

# Agony and Ecstasy

Henry van Zeyst

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# Introducing the Subject

I am aware that the title of this booklet “*Agony and Ecstasy*” will sound very familiar to many and I gladly admit having derived this title from the famous book “The Agony and the Ecstasy” by Irving Stone, which was made into an equally famous film, depicting an important period of the life of Michaelangelo, that greatest artist of the Italian Renaissance, painter, sculptor and architect, builder of St. Peter’s dome, painter of the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, sculptor of the famous statues of David in Florence, of Moses and the Pieta in Rome, to mention just a few.

Well, this present booklet has nothing in common with those great creations—except the title, which I borrowed, asking for the kind permission of the Publishers, with appreciation and admiration. I could not not help doing so, as the title is so appropriate to the subjects to be dealt with: the five mental hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) and the five states of mental absorption (*jhāna*). Five agonies and five ecstasies, which, as shall be seen, can cancel out one another, till the final emancipation, which is beyond all agonising conflict (*dukkhā*) and ecstatic joy.

Henri van Zeyst  
14th May,  
1978,  
Uplands Estate,  
Kandy, Sri Lanka.

From: Henri G. A. van Zeyst  
Kandy  
Sri Lanka

18th Sept. 1977

The Publication Manager  
Messrs. Doubleday & Co. New York  
U.S.A.

**The Agony and the Ecstasy**

Dear Sir,

I am the author of several books on Buddhism during the last 37 years and I am presently preparing a comparative study on what are called in Buddhist terminology the five hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) in spiritual progress: lust, hate, sloth, agitation and doubt, with the five states of concentration or mental absorption (*jhāna*) from the silencing of discursive thought to one-pointedness of mind.

The two sets appear to cancel out one another, thus preparing the ground for the final emancipation of Nirvana. The conflict within, as seen against the tranquillity in meditation has suggested to me as title: Agony & Ecstasy

I am, of course, fully aware of the title of Irving Stone's beautiful book on the life of Michael Angelo, published by you, and made into an equally beautiful film of the same title. Both are too well known internationally not to draw one's attention thereto, if I were to publish my study under a very similar name: Agony and Ecstasy.

Although I am advised that the borrowing of the title would not be an infringement of copy-rights, yet I prefer as an act of courtesy to obtain your kind permission to make use of the title (and that only) which seems so appropriate to my proposed study.

I shall be, therefore, both be grateful and obliged to have your and/or the author's permission (if you could contact him on my behalf) to make use of this title with full acknowledgement.

The similarity of the two studies begins and ends with the title.

With best regards,

Yours faithfully,

H. G. A. Van Zeyst

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New York 10017

October 20, 1977.

Mr. H. G. A. van Zeyst,  
Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Dear Mr. van Zeyst,

In answer to your kind letter concerning the use of the title, *Agony & Ecstasy*, we can grant permission for its use in your manual. Titles are not copyrighted, and since Mr. Stone's book was published in 1965, it does not seem that there would be a conflict of interest. Best of luck in the publication of your manual.

Sincerely,

Dorothy M. Harris, Permissions Editor.



# Chapter 1

## The Five Hindrances

In the teaching of the Buddha there is a great deal of negative approach in thought and in action, in vision and in meditation, in morality and in philosophy, as they are found in his preaching (*suttas*) and in his teaching (*abhidhammā*). His moral standards are not in the form of commandments, but as lessons to a disciple (*sikkhāpada*) to abstain from various evils. Progress on the road to perfection is measured by the removal of obstacles (*saṃyojana*); purity of mind and heart is achieved by the removal of impurities (*khināsavā*); hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*) have to be overcome, fetters (*saṃyojana*) to be loosened. Ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*mohā*) are shown as root-causes of all evil. Evolution itself, as dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*), leads from ignorance (*avijjā*) to conflict (*dukkhā*), which is the absence of peace and tranquillity. This ultimate peace itself is called Nirvana (*Nibbāna*), the extinction of craving and of delusion, and is defined as the cessation of becoming (*bhāva-nirodhā*), to be realised only through insight (*vipassanā*) that all is impermanent (*aniccā*), that every complex is a conflict (*dukkhā*) and that all is without soul or substance or abiding entity (*anattā*).

It is with this background of negative thinking that a new approach is possible, which is not purposeful or aimed at achievement, but which is an intelligent awakening to what is. And if such understanding is not conditioned by a desire for progress or learning or virtue, then in mere seeing what is there will be a new understanding which is not knowledge but insight. To see things thus with the vision of insight means seeing without reliance on traditions, without dependence on the authority of teachers, seeing without hope or fear. Then the truth can be seen even in the false. And in that understanding whatever is false will fade.

What the Buddha did was pointing out the false, and if we understand that, there will be no more false to cling to, no more delusion to support us, no more ideals to crave for. Such is the essence of this negative approach. And in the following pages we shall consider this approach in the removal of the hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*). But that alone cannot lead to a realisation of freedom, when such hindrances are removed and avoided in search of peace and tranquillity. The search for peace is a striving for an ideal state of mind which we do not know; for that is the reason and the cause of the search. If we know, the search is over. And so we meet with the strange parallel which involves the overcoming of the hindrances and the culture of peace of mind.

It is this parallel which is the theme of this study. For, the hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*) are mental obsessions which prevent a free movement of independent observation. They are the lust of the senses (*kāmacchanda*), the hate of aversion (*vyapada*), sloth and torpor of mind and body (*thīna-middha*), agitation in hope and worry in fear (*uddhaccā-kukkuccā*) and the doubt of perplexity (*vicikicchā*). These obsessions (*panca nīvaranani*) can so preoccupy the mind, that life becomes a real agony.

Then, when in mind-culture (*bhavanā*) a way is shown of peace and tranquillity (*samathā*), which could change this agony into an ecstasy of mental absorption (*jhāna*), the parallel is clear

and needs only a step by step illustration, comparing the five hindrances with the five states of mental absorption in this world of sense and form (*kamā-loka*, *rupā-loka*). While the five hindrances are the result of indulgence and indiscipline, the five stages of mental absorption are stages of discipline and mind-control. Thus they form, as it were, the antidotes for the poisons which have defiled body and mind with their impurities.

We shall then first consider these defilements (*nivaraṇā*) one by one in detail according to the Suttas and the Abhidhamma, and try to understand their cause, their meaning and their functioning. Next, we shall do the same with the five states of mental absorption (*jhāna*), their growth and development, that is, their culture (*bhavanā*) of tranquillity; and then see how each provides an antidote against one of the mental poisons; and finally how a dissolution through insight (*vipassanā*) leads beyond both agony and ecstasy.

The five hindrances (*panca nivarani*) arise in this world of mind and matter (*nama-rupā*), where matter or the body informs the mind, and where thought gives purposeful meaning to the physical actions of the body. It is then in the aggregates of individual existence (*pañcakkhandha*) that hindrances take shape according to the nature of those aggregates.

The five aggregates of clinging (*panc-upadanakkhandha*) are enumerated as the physical body and its material senses (*rupā*), and the four mental aggregates of sensation (*vedanā*) which receive the impression of a physical contact; perception (*sannā*) which is the resident memory which compares the present impact with past experience; conception (*saṅkharā*) which identifies, classifies and judges the new experience; and consciousness (*viññāna*) which is the mental reaction to this composite action of grasping in reception, perception and conception. It is the conscious reaction of the mind (*viññāna*) which is volition (*cetanā*), which is then the cause of action, (*kammā*) and its moral result (*vipāka*).

It is in this set-up of activity of matter and mind that the hindrances are found to obstruct, impede and block all progress. The physical senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch form the bases of sensuality (*kāmacchanda*) which sets up a hindrance to the natural function of those senses in mere seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, by causing them to become instruments of grasping. The mental formation which receives the impressions of physical contact as sensations or feelings (*vedanā*) is the initiation of a process of selection of likes and dislikes, which is one of opposition. It is here that the seeds of ill-will (*vyapada*) are sown. Then, in the perception (*sannā*) of this reception comes into play the memory, which is knowledge of the past, the tendency to cling to the past, to preserve tradition, to accept authority without understanding. It is a sluggishness (*thīna-middha*) of the mind, communicated to the body, a fear to let go what is known, a fear to up-root what has provided security to the self in the past. When such perception of the past, compared and clung to, is estimated and judged in its various components, and grouped and classified in the various compartments (*sankara*) of mental formations, one sees perception becoming a conception of an ideal, the past becoming the future. And therewith arises, the on-set of agitation and worry (*uddhaccā-kukkuccā*), projecting the memory into an ideal, the past into the future, hope and fear becoming a volition of continuance in the insecurity of the present. It is thought as consciousness (*viññāna*), grown out of the entanglement which now perceives as well as conceives the conflict of its own making. Being conceived in this conflict of clinging to the past in memory (*sannā*), and of craving for release into an ideal concept (*saṅkharā*) of the future, thought seeks a substitute but cannot find a solution either in denial or escape or sublimation. This is the perplexity (*vicikicchā*) of the mind seeking a solution outside itself without understanding that its own thought is the cause of its perplexity.

Thus, the the hindrances (*panca nivarani*) have grown up with the growth of consciousness in the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). And it will be, therefore, also in the mind that those hindrances will have to be removed, for which close examination will be necessary.

## 1.1 The urge of the Senses

Desire for sense-satisfaction (*kāmacchanda*) is found only in the world of sense (*kamā-loka*). An escape is sought in the delights of form (*rūpa*) and of the abstract (*arapa*) through substitution and sublimation. But, before following those flights of thought, one must understand the nature of this urge, its constitution, association, aim and purpose.

It is called an urge (*chandā*) which is stronger than a wish or a desire. It is an impelling force, a driving force, which does not allow the mind to rest, and thus it is the most difficult state to understand or to overcome, even though, as carnal desire, it is also the grossest of all passions. It will function through any of the senses, and as greed or lust it is found as craving for sensual indulgence (*kamā-taṇha*), that is, craving for the pleasures of the five bodily senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. It is thus distinct from craving for existence or rebirth (*bhāva-taṇha*) and from craving for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇha*), the escapism of annihilation of responsibility.

It is a mental factor (*cetasikā*), that is, a concomitant, a coefficient, mutually connected with others, “having a common origin, a common cessation, a common basis and a common object of sense” (Kvu. vii. 2); not to be understood as something joined to thought, because it has no independent existence. Mental factors are the contents of thought, they constitute thought and are co-products of the interaction of the sense-objects and the sense-organs. Mental factors are the elements of the complex (*saṅkharā*) of thought. Thus there is no thought without mental factors, and there are no mental factors separate from thought. Some are wholesome in their make-up and skilful in their activity, while others are not. Some will combine easily with others, but not at all with their opposites. In those combinations or complexes (*saṅkharā*) they form the various types of thought.

Now, the mental factor of desire-to-do or urge-to-act (*chandā-cetasikā*) is the sixth of a group of factors which are not always present in any thought complex, for which reason it is called particular (*pakiṇṇaka*). Being neither good nor bad in itself, it becomes so through association. As zeal for righteousness (*kusaladhammacchanda*: A. III. 441) it will appear as virtue; but as cruelty (*vihinsachanda*: S. II. 151) it will help to form a vice.

As a desire for sense-satisfaction (*kāmacchanda*) it is always unskilful, for it is an impulse to act, rooted in craving. The Dhammasangani (III. 2) has seventy-seven descriptive terms for this root of evil, the most interesting ones of them deserving a place here together with their explanations as given in the Dhammapada, Sutta Nipata and the Atthasalini commentary.

It is a passion (*raga*), in the sense of lust. It seduces (*anunaya*) or leads along in the fields of the senses, thus simulating true love (*mettā*). It gives delight (*nandī*), which constitutes its attraction and at the same time hides its danger. It is an inflammation of the mind (*cittassa saraga*). Its insatiability is indicated in a climax: wanting (*icchā*), that is wishing; languishing (*mucchā*), that is, desiring to the point of inertia, devouring (*ajjhosānā*), that is, grasping, swallowing and putting a complete end to it. It is called a swamp (*paṇka*) and a flood (*oghā*), because it submerges the person in whom it exists in the repeated rounds of birth and death, and makes him sink lower and lower. By desire, lust and greed man is drawn towards rebirth as a magnet (*ejā*), yoked to it (*yoga*) and tied to it (*ganthā*). Hence it is the great illusion (*maya*), deception and fraud; for, instead of giving satisfaction, it creates greater emptiness and stronger desires. It is called a mother or genetrix (*janikā*), because it leads to rebirth; desire begets a man (*taṇha janeti purisam*). As a seamstress (*sibhani*) sews cloth to cloth, so lust stitches decease to reconception. Its manifold sense-experiences become then like a net, a snare (*jālini*), a fish-hook (*balisā*), by which beings get caught. It is like a swift current (*sarītā*) carrying off all before it, a string (*suttā*) securing fish-nets, thus chaining together destruction and misfortune. It urges (*ahuyahani*), causing beings to toil after this and that. It becomes a

travelling companion or comrade, or a mate (*dutiya*) through life and death (Sutta Nipata 740). It is like a rope by which cattle are bound at the neck, thus leading on to rebirth (*bhavanetti*), like dogs by a leash (*gaddulā*). It is like a forest (*vanā*) with obnoxious trees, like a jungle (*vanathā*) with dense undergrowth, where all kinds of danger live (Dhp. v. 283). There is no connection (*patibhandhu*), no relative, so intimate as greed. Yet, far from being sociable, it is like a creeper (*latā*) which strangles the tree which keeps it standing (Dhp v. 340).

Thus, it is truly the root (*hetū*), the source (*niddana*), the producer (*pabhavā*) of ill and woe, never to be filled, like the ocean (*samuddā*). It is an obstruction (*āvaraṇā*), because it blocks the development of moral mental states, a hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) to the development of mental absorption (*jhāna*), a bondage (*banddhana*) on the wheel of *saṃsāra*, the ever revolving wheel of birth and death. It is a corruption (*upakkilesā*), because it defiles the mind; and a latent tendency (*anusayā*) like a chronic disease, pervading the mind (*pariyuṭṭhāna*) as a cancerous growth.

Desire for sense-satisfaction (*kāmacchanda*), like other types of greed (*lobhā*) and lust (*raga*), is never combined, however, with hate (*dosā*) to which it stands opposed as attraction against repulsion, or like against dislike. It is never combined with perplexity (*vicikicchā*) either, because that mental factor knows neither attraction nor repulsion, owing to its wavering nature (see below, p. 19). But it will always be associated with delusion (*mohā*), without which no unskilful action would be performed.

All this is certainly helpful in arriving at an understanding of the nature of this urge for sense-satisfaction (*kāmacchanda*). But, this understanding is mere knowledge, which is as far as books and teachers can be helpful. Knowledge of composition can be brought about through analysis. But in analysis there is no actual experience of the action of sense-satisfaction. While analysing the mind and its factors, there will be some mental satisfaction. That, too, of course, is a reaction which can be experienced and understood as regards aim and purpose. If the purpose of analysing and knowing the nature of desire for satisfaction is to overcome this desire, then there is merely a substitution of one kind of desire with another kind. The subsequent desire may be more refined, but that makes it all the more difficult to recognise it. In this search for knowledge with the purpose to overcome the blemish of desire, there is still a search for satisfaction which has the removal of the hindrance of desire for its aim. And so, a search is its own frustration. The desire to get rid of desire is an obvious delusion and can never lead to understanding. A desire to overcome a hindrance is a condemnation thereof, even without understanding. The long list of 77 descriptive terms has certainly provided much knowledge, but not a decrease of desire. It may even have increased the list by another type of desire, the delusion of desire as something to be got rid of by means of desire. It is clear that knowledge has not produced understanding.

Lust (*kamā*) has been named as an urge (*chandā*). Where does this urge come from? Physically, it is a mechanical function of the animal nature in response to a periodical call. It is nature's way of evolution and propagation in its struggle for survival through renewal. Just as the taste of food provides the stimulus not only to eat but also to grow food and prepare it, so the sexual pleasures associated with the act of copulation act as a stimulus thereto. Such stimulus, however, is far from creative, and is frequently the end and the purpose of the sexual act. The pleasure is the purpose, and its repetition ensures some sort of continuation. But that would be the continuation of the 'self' and not of the species as intended by nature in its endeavour for continuation through renewal. The search for pleasure, which is the desire for satisfaction (*kāmacchanda*), is always repetitive; and in that search the act becomes mechanical, functional and meaningless in itself. In the search for pleasure there is no understanding, no correspondence, no relationship, no love; but only desire for pleasure, for self-satisfaction, for self-gratification, which is lust.

Repetition belongs to the function of memory through which the self survives psychologically. This striving for survival is, of course, far from creative, for its aim is not renewal but continuation. The sexual act is creative only as an act of renewal; but when the mind seeks continuance of self in pro-creation, there is no understanding of the true relationship which is so necessary in this joint adventure: When gratification is the motive, there is only exploitation as purpose and as means. And that is opposition and hate, where there should be union and love. Such gratification has to be repeated, for memory cannot store actual experience. It is then memory which is the continuation of the past in thought, it is memory which provides that continuation of a self, it is memory which provides the urge for lust and its repetition. But in memory there is only a selection of thoughts, of ideas, which now become ideals into the future; but there is no understanding of the need of the present when there is greed for satisfaction.

Without ideals and without memory there will be no craving and no clinging. In understanding there will be no opposition, no searching for pleasure, for a goal, for 'self'; then action will be enlightened and spontaneous and creative and beautiful and true, in the awakening of life.

## 1.2 Aversion

Malice (*vyapada*) is the second important hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) found to obstruct, impede and block all progress. It is a kind of hate (*dosā*) or aversion (*paṭigha*), repugnance, resentment, ill-will. It is always accompanied by grief (*domanassā-sahagata*). Even when not actually bursting out in anger, one continues to foster this smouldering feeling of aversion (D. III. 254). This feeling need not always express itself in harmful deeds or words; it can show itself even in silence. Thus, in the Brahmajala Sutta (D. I. 25) an instance is given where some recluses and brahmanas refrained from expressing any opinion, fearing to be influenced by their wish (*chandā*) or desire (*raga*), by their ill-feeling (*dosā*) or resentment (*paṭigha*).

It occurs together with a feeling of hate (*dosā*), envy (*issā*), meanness (*macchariyā*), worry (*kukkuccā*) and agitation (*uddhaccā*), the last two of which, however, are treated as separate factors as hindrances (*nivaraṇā*), as we shall see later. The morbid states of mind, called sloth (*thīna*), and its physical counterpart, torpor (*middha*), are found combining with hate and aversion. They, too, are treated separately as hindrances (*nivaraṇā*). In these mental states there is no happiness of mind, not even wicked joy, because they are always associated with melancholy (*domanassā sahagata*).

Malice then is an annoyance (*āghātā*) arising at the thought that somebody is doing to me now, or has done in the past, or will do so in the future, harm or any kind of disadvantageous action by thought, word or deed; or that he will do so, has done so, or is doing so now to somebody dear to me. This annoyance may arise also, when somebody is doing, has done, or will do some good turn to a person I dislike. All this is real aversion, resentment, repugnance and hostility (*pativirodha*). But annoyance can also arise consciously unmotivated (*asaṅkhārika*), e.g. when there is too much or not enough of rain, or sunshine, or wind; or when stumbling over a tree-stump. As this kind of annoyance arises concerning things and not concerning persons, it is said to be groundless (*aṭṭhāne*), because unconscious elements can have no purpose in opposing our wishes. But in a sense, all forms of annoyance are unreasonable, and thus hate and ill-will are always combined with delusion (*mohā*).

Ill-will (*kopā*), irritation (*pakopā*), indignation (*sampakopā*) indicate an ascending scale in degrees of anger, which is a mental vexation with a tendency to resist and oppose, mind becomes upset (*cittassa vyapatti*) and begins to abhor and detest (*manopadosa*). There is even a class of heavenly beings (*devā*), called the detesting ones (*manopadasika*) in the celestial planes of authority (*cattummaharajika devaloka*), who develop an intense disgust for one another, merely

from looking at each other too long, proving that not all is well in heaven.

Ill-will (*vyapada*), finding its root in hate (*dosā*), is always connected with envy (*issā*), meanness (*macchariyā*) and worry (*kukkuccha*), which last one has the distinction of being singled out as a hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) in its combination with agitation (*uddhucca*). Ill-will is on the other hand never combined with joy (*pīti*) either for good or bad, nor with mental happiness (*somanassā*); thus the mind in this state of aversion will always be gloomy and morose with distress, caused by the presence of, and the opposition to an undesirable object. The flaring up of anger all of a sudden, like a smitten snake, is said to be characteristic of this mentality, which manifests itself in offending or even injuring others, as an enemy in ambush waiting for his chance (Atthas. ii. 9). On account of this averse attitude not a word is well chosen; there is no finished speech, but a want of forbearance, abruptness (*asuropa*) and churlishness (*candikka*).

Envy (*issā*), with which ill-will (*vyapada*) is always combined in hate (*dosā*), from which it springs, is a form of discontent, or jealousy and grumbling at the prosperity of others. This prosperity may be any kind of gain, honour, respect, affection, popularity, as well as the more obvious gains of property, learning, achievements, position, etc. It is not that one wishes this prosperity for oneself, because envy does not grow from the root of greed (*lobhā*), but from hate (*dosā*) with which it is always combined. Such discontent can exist without greed, e.g., in him who grudges the title given to someone else, though he himself has already the same distinction. This is envy in a negative way, i.e. discontentment about the prosperity of others. Most racial hatred stems from this. Positively, it will be some kind of satisfaction over the misfortune of others, even if that bad luck does not mean gain to oneself. It includes a concealed expectation and desire for the other person's downfall.

Although envy (*issā*) is not mentioned in the list of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) when given in the Suttas, yet in the Abhidhammathammasaṅgaha and commentary it is called a fetter preventing one from entering the path of holiness, but which is completely overcome in the first stage, that of the 'stream-winner' (*sotāpanna*). It is, therefore, only this special kind of ill-will (*vyapada*) which does not occur, after the first stage, while the fetter of ill-will itself is weakened in the second stage by a 'once-returner' (*sakadāgāmi*) and totally undone in the third stage by the 'non-returner' (*anāgāmi*) to life in Samsāra's world of sense-pleasure.

Meanness (*macchariyā*), the other close connection of ill-will (*vyapada*), both springing from the root of hate (*dosā*), although it is a lack of generosity, is not a kind of greed (*lobhā*), at least not in its full grown state of hardness (*thaddha macchariyā*). For, then a person will even prevent another from giving to a third. "May this not be advantageous to another" (*ma annassa acchariyam hotu: Vibh. Atth.*). "Such men hinder the feeding of the poor" (S. 1. 120). And thus it becomes one of the main causes of rebirth in the spheres of unsatisfiable desires (*petayoni*).

In the more moderate degree meanness, called soft (*mudukā*), it is rather selfishness, for it is grudging another a share in one's own dwelling place, a share of familiarity with one's own relations, or a share in the doctrine one adheres to. Such grudging to share, however, is not considered as selfishness, if e.g. the persons who ask for lodging are quarrelsome, or if it is foreseen that bad use will be made of gifts, or if the person who asks for instruction is not capable of understanding it and will probably become confused.

Meanness (*macchariyā*), like envy (*issā*) is overcome by a 'stream-winner' (*sotāpanna*) as a fetter (*saṃyojana*), though their root (*vyapada*) is only uprooted by a 'non-returner' (*anāgāmi*).

Having learned all there is to learn about ill-will and hate, let us now try to understand what it is in itself, not merely to see and then avoid the harmful consequences. For, when we consider the consequences of an act, whether it is to advantage or not, materially or spiritually, thought is focussed on the result, and the act itself becomes a mere instrument and means thereto.

When driving in with a hammer a nail in some wood, the concentration is on the purpose of fixing that wood, for which purpose the hammer is useful, But that does not provide any

understanding as to the nature of the hammer. In this example, of course, the point at issue is not the hammer but the fixing, and so there is no need to understand anything about the hammer apart from its utility. Similarly, one may use action or a definite purpose, but that can never provide understanding of that action. When this action proves to be none but the individuality of the actor, it becomes of the highest importance to understand this action, to see whether it is being, used as an instrument by a separate actor, the I, whether there is any actor apart from action, whether this action is free or conditioned by motives, etc.

Now, what happens with the arising of a thought of hate or ill-will? There is obviously an aversion, that is, a turning away from something which is disliked. Thus, to understand a feeling of ill-will, there must be understanding of this tendency of aversion and dislike. In short, why do I dislike something? Dislike is an emotion causing one to turn away from something or somebody, because it is felt to be disagreeable, either unsuitable in food or in climate or in opinion. There is, therefore, a judgement made, based on comparison, which is always of the new with the old. One meets with a situation, and at once thought flashes back into the past, into memory, into selected and favoured remembrances, all of which have contributed to the building up of this individual 'self'. There is no 'I' without those memories, and the 'I' is therefore the sum-total of those selected memories, mementos. Any new experience is now tested against this background through comparison; and its acceptance or rejection depends on the outcome of this comparative examination. Whatever strengthens the image of 'self' already there, is accepted and liked; whatever threatens to break down that image is rejected and disliked. Thus there is no understanding of the new experience at all, but only the desire to strengthen the idea of 'self' and make it safe.

Aversion from that idea is, then, the outcome of a predetermined standard test. These preconceptions are the barriers which prevent understanding. In comparing, one does not meet the new situation with a new and open mind, but with old thoughts of prejudice, with conditioned thinking, dependent on traditional views, religious beliefs, ideological dogmas, racial bias, class consciousness, personal views which are one's likes and dislikes, based on individual idiosyncrasies.

Understanding now the nature of ill-will to be an aversion from the new in order to preserve the old, thought will cease to proceed on those lines. Ceasing to focus its attention on the past, refusing to project that memory as an ideal in the future, the mind is now free to see the present, the new, the action without reaction, free to meet and listen to the new message of the present. In this turning to the present, there is no turning away from it, no aversion, no hate.

### 1.3 Indolence

Sloth (*thīna*) and torpor (*middha*) are always mentioned in one breath. They are a twin set, although not identical. And, therefore, their academic interest lies in their difference. They are unhealthy mental factors (*akusalā cetasikā*), sometimes conditioned by desire (*lobhā*), other times by aversion (*dosā*).

Sloth (*thīna*) is a mental disease, producing a morbid state of mind, lacking animation and interest. It is an unhealthy (*akalyatā*) disposition, which in its unwieldiness and inertness prevents the mind to act. In all its phases it is a kind of negative evil, "refusal to do what ought to be done" (Aldous Huxley: Ends and Means). This mental disease, which has always a degree of delusion (*mohā*) in the background without amounting to mental derangement, is a kind of stupor, a mild degree of stupidity, which prevents mental alertness. intelligent interest, spiritual progress. It will express itself frequently as attachment to all that is old (conservatism), because it is afraid of all novelty which involves a change of behaviour. Thus, the high esteem in which tradition, culture, rituals, etc. are held, is frequently a sign of intellectual bluntness, lack of

initiative, fear of the open spaces waiting for the mind's discovery. It is the "yielding to, the non-rejection of, non-expulsion, non-freeing, but retaining a sensual, angry or cruel thought" (A. IV. 2).

It can combine with greed (*lobhā*), but only in those classes of thought which are prompted by some conscious motive (*sasaṅkhārika*), which is due to its inert nature. Under the same condition of influence (*sasaṅkhārika*) it may combine with hate (*dosā*), but of course, never in the same thought, because greed and hate are mutually exclusive.

That sloth (*thīna*), which is a kind of morbidity, should be able to combine with delightful interest, may be surprising; yet it is frequently found in people who seem to find pleasure in their own misery, because they derive great satisfaction from the compassion of others, for which reason they treasure up their misfortunes and hug their sorrows, which they are too indolent to overcome.

Torpor (*middha*) is frequently taken as the physical counterpart of the primarily intellectual sloth (*thīna*), with which it is always combined. As a mental factor (*cetasikā*) it is emotional and always unhealthy (*akusalā*), producing an evil effect. But it may be an effect of mere physical weakness, or due to seasonal influence; and then even a highly virtuous person will be subject to torpor or drowsiness. Thus, the Buddha once found his chief disciple, Maha Moggallana, subject to drowsiness, and advised him: "Noddest thou, Moggallana, dozeest thou? If, while thou abidest thoughtful, drowsiness comes over thee, take no heed of it, make no ado of that. Or if it pass not, then shouldst thou ponder in thy heart on the Dhamma, as heard and mastered, then explore it and with thy mind review it. Or thou shouldst repeat the Dhamma in detail. Or thou shouldst pull both earlobes and knead the limbs with thy hand. Or thou shouldst arise from sitting, clean thine eyes with water, survey the horizon and gaze up at the starry constellations. Or thou shouldst apply thy mind to the thought of light, fix thy mind on the thought of day—as by day, so by night—as by night, so by day. Thus, with mind unhindered and unhampered, thou shouldst make thy thought become radiant. Or with sense withdrawn, the mind not outward gone, thou shouldst fix thy thought on walking, conscious of thy movements, to and fro. Or if all that fails to shake off torpor, thou shouldst lion-like lie down on thy right side, foot covering foot, mindful, self-possessed, thy mind set on arising; and on awakening get up quickly, thinking: I will not live yoked to the pleasures of sleeping, reclining and drowsiness" (A. VII. 6. 58).

The fact that torpor (*middha*) is counted as a mental factor (*cetasikā*), while otherwise it is explained as physical drowsiness, is not a contradiction; for, by the word 'body' (*kayā*) here are understood sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*sannā*) and mental formations (*saṅkharā*) through which we have subjective experience of bodily states, objectively conceived. Hence, sloth (*thīna*) is confined to consciousness (*viññāṇa*) with its representative and reflexive knowledge, while torpor (*middha*) is found in the other three mental aggregates (*khandhā*). They are always unskillful, because they are tendencies to vegetate, leading to unawareness, following the path of the least resistance.

In combination, the twin set of sloth and torpor (*thinamiddhā*) forms one of the five hindrances (*panca nivaranaṇi*), which constitutes an obstacle on the path of ethical and spiritual progress. This state of apathy and insensibility could have its origin in a disorganised function of the body, its blood-circulation or disorder of some glands, but is usually symptomised as an emotional indifference, which is indolence of the mind. We may leave the discovery of physical symptoms and causes to medical men who can tell us how they originate and where. But an intelligent approach will want to understand the reason why there is at times an indifference in emotional feelings, which is a tardiness amounting to laziness in the understanding of symptoms and events. It is not that the mind is incapable of understanding, but it is reluctance in directing the mind to understand, or even to see a problem, rather pursuing a policy of self-delusion.

It is a typical attitude of escape by ignoring the issue, when there is an unconscious suspicion

that, if action is taken it might result in unpleasant developments. Thus one turns a blind eye and a deaf ear, and pretends ignorance as an excuse for non-action. It is an obvious case of extreme isolation in search of self-protection. This insensibility is much more common than one would expect; and it expresses itself in a policy of non-involvement, leading up to callousness. Such attitude is a withholding of awareness through fear of consequences, fear of loss to oneself; and thus there may be a shifting of attention in order to escape involvement by means of sublimation. All striving for the attainment of an ideal is basically an escape from actuality, an artificial insensitivity to what is, through focussing one's attention elsewhere. It is only an open mind, which is not prejudiced by memory and which does not escape into idealism, only an open mind that can be sensitive and alive and aware in understanding, all-embracing in sympathy, and truly universal in love.

Sensitivity is not something which can be developed. It is always there, but we protect it, as we wear shoes, so as not to get hurt. But the hurt is only an idea, a concept of fear, not of the future that may never happen, but fear of possible loss. And what can one possibly lose but oneself, that fixation of an ideal of security without which there can be no thought, no idea even of 'self'. In sensitivity there is the vulnerability of a castle in the air to which we cling in childish ignorance. Thus, in sluggishness, the mind avoids a confrontation of seeing and understanding what is. It is this refusal to see which makes it impossible to be intelligently awake, in fear of discovering that there is no 'self' to cling to. Agitation (*uddhaccā*) and worry (*kukkuccā*) are always spoken of together as another set of twins. Their common ground is a restlessness of mind and loss of equanimity, while their difference lies in their respective bases. For, agitation, (*uddhaccā*) is to be found in any unhealthy state of mind, whether its basis is greed (*lobhā*), hate (*dosā*) or delusion (*mohā*); but worry (*kukkuccā*) produces a displeased or angry state of mind, due to its exclusive combination with ill-will which is hate (*dosā*).

## 1.4 Agitation

Agitation (*uddhaccā*) or flurry is a mental excitement with respect to purpose, which causes uncertainty and lack of balance, due to lack of understanding and inability to comprehend. The commentary (Atthasālini II. ix. 3) explains that here is only intended the wavering as to one object, in which respect it differs from doubt (*vicikicchā*). Apart from combining with all the other aspects and factors (*cetasikā*) of a deluded mind (*mohā*), agitation (*uddhaccā*) is found to associate also with resolve (*adhimokkhā*) or with perplexity (*vicikicchā*), but not with both at the same time, as these factors are mutually exclusive. Resolve (*adhimokkhā*) prevents thought from wavering with regard to the choice of object, and agitation may then cause a more firm fixation in that choice. But it can never associate with doubt as perplexity (*vicikicchā*), because resolve or decision (*adhimokkhā*) puts an end to perplexity which is a wavering of thought in its choice between objects. Yet, in this wavering state there can be but little determined volition and hence it is too weak and ineffectual to produce rebirth; its effects are experienced subsequently, in conditioning rather than in causing. According to its character, it brings the mind in a reeling state, like the swaying of a moving cart. In its unsteadiness leading to distraction, it stands opposed to mindfulness (*satī*).

It is the typical mental disease of our modern times, the excitement of expectation followed by the depression of disappointment and the worry of failure. Even scientific research-work is labouring under this disease. In our modern research institutes there is an overstrained tension resulting from the deception that something new must be brought to the scientific market, and from fear of being anticipated by somebody else. This double tension must create a nervous pressure which will make the work suffer. It is that spirit of agitation and flurry which has introduced comparative examinations, where it is not enough to be good, where one has to be

better than others. It is the spirit of competition in sports as well as in industry and commerce. It is the spirit to out-do, to out-run, to out-match another, which makes the work unskilful (*akusalā*), where a well-balanced even-mindedness would only regard the work done, and would be content to out-grow all competition in evolving naturally and intelligently.

Agitation is not a sign of spiritual fervour and zeal; it is not even an indication of a striving mind, but only betrays the presence of an emotional condition influencing the mind in its eagerness to produce results. Here again, the end in view dominates the action, the need of which is neither understood nor considered. It is the restlessness of a mind in search of an ideal. As long as the mind is searching, it obviously knows no rest, no peace. Lack of stability and security make the mind search for an escape in which to find rest and peace. Not knowing what peace is, except from descriptions in books which speak of peace at the end of war, the search is then just an escape from the agitation and turmoil in which the mind finds itself, when comparing its state with those remembered and desired. As Christians look forward to the second coming of Christ to establish the new Jerusalem, and Buddhists aspire to be born again when Maitri Bodhisatta, will usher in his kingdom of love—thereby turning away from the teachings of Jesus and of Gotama the Buddha—so each individual agitation in search of an ideal is a turning away from the truth which is here and now. And the truth is that the mind is searching, is restless, is agitated.

Now, if the mind, instead of running away from the truth by trying to escape into an ideal, just sees the fact of its own restlessness without condemnation, without doing anything about it, it will not be searching for a possible escape into an ideal of peace, but it will understand that this agitation is just the wish to escape, to run away from what is, in an effort to become the ideal. In that understanding—that a search for an ideal is not a search for truth—in that direct understanding all search will naturally cease, all agitation will come to a natural end, without suppression or sublimation which are further ideals and agitation. In that cessation of unrest there will be a natural peace, which is not made by mind in search of an ideal, and which, therefore, is unconditioned, without opposition, without desire, without conflict.

Worry (*kukkuccā*) on the other hand does not project itself into an ideal future, but brings about remorse over unskilful acts done in the past, or over so-called sinful neglect. Thus it is repentance, regret, producing a displeased state of mind. “Because we cannot undo evil done, or do the good left undone, therefore the reproach of the mind is unskilful, because it scales and scars the mind, as the point of an awl does a metal bowl” (Atthasalini iii. 2.2.).

It will be seen that this mental factor (*cetasikā*) arises as an after-thought of scruple; but, therefore, it should not be confused with scrupulosity or conscientiousness (*hiri*). Neither should it be mistaken for a sense of responsibility, as this last one is a sense of liability that much in the future depends on a present action, while worry (*kukkuccā*) is about an action in the past which cannot be recalled. Fretting over the past is thus not only useless in itself, but is also inhibitive, because it occupies and wastes the precious time of the moment, which could have been used for improvement, in the sense of doing better. And so it is not only remorse of neglect in the past, but it is further neglect in the present, too. Worry, therefore, means always a loss of effective power, and hence it is always unskilful and unhealthy (*akusalā*). It is even incompatible with that kind of delight (*pīti*) which sees a brighter side at least in anticipation.

Seeing all these effects of a thoroughly unhealthy mental state which is an obstacle and hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) not only to progress, but to any action, the question naturally arises: Why should the mind worry at all? It could be uneasiness in the mind for its inability to reach the security of a projected ideal, but this inability is a reluctance to move away from what is. ‘What is’ may be seen as unsatisfactory, and this unsatisfactory state of affairs may be seen as being due to incomplete action in the past and incomplete understanding thereof. But still the mind clings to that memory rather than to an imaginary and ideal future, for it has been stored

up in memory as something real, the only real thing the mind can think of, and that is the ‘self’. I may have failed myself in the past, I may have failed to live up to the expectations of others, I may not be a reproduction of that ideal; but in my failure I have nothing else but that ‘self’. And unless worry and remorse lead to the extreme of annihilation in suicide, it is the only thing I can cling to, going over and over again over the same grounds, trying to find an excuse or an explanation of that failure which I am. In this self-reproach there is no looking forward to a brighter future, no looking upward in hopeful prayer to some imaginary super-power, no looking round even to see my own actual state of mind, for in total isolation I am cutting off myself from all relationship which could reveal the past as past.

Thus, not only I am that failure, but I am actually failing all the time. I see that ‘self’ slipping down and all mental effort is centred on that event in paralysing fear.

Worry is fear of public opinion, fear of consequences, fear of losing even the final shreds of respectability which remain. But that means that I am that public opinion, I am that concept of respectability to which I cling because there is nothing else to cling to. Only by letting go that concept of ‘self’ which is just myself, I am free from all opinion, from all respect, from all standards; free from all clinging to concepts, from failure as well as from success. In that freedom there is no ‘self’, and hence no worry, and no obstacle, no hindrance, no conflict. There is just freedom.

## 1.5 Perplexity

The last of the five hindrances (*patina nivaranaṇi*) is doubt, which is perplexity (*vicikicchā*). As a mental factor (*cetasikā*) it stands in a class all by itself, in so far as it does not occur or combine with any other particular factor, and does not proceed either from greed (*lobhā*) or hate (*dosā*). It is thus an offspring from delusion pure and simple (*mohā*). It produces a wavering state of mind, which is an undecisiveness as to a choice in objects, which is perplexity. Herein it differs from agitation (*uddhaccā*) which is wavering as to one object, which is due to excitement. Thus it happens that in eleven out of twelve cases, agitation (*uddhaccā*) will combine with resolve (*adhimokkhā*), but perplexity (*vicikicchā*) will never do this.

Perplexity (*vicikicchā*), which is always unhealthy and unskilful (*akusalā*), should not be confused with the skilful doubt which is the spirit of enquiry and investigation (*dhammavicaya*), and which is even a factor of enlightenment (*sambojjhaṅgā*). Doubt which is perplexity (*vicikicchā*) is the hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) which prevents the realisation of the actual nature of things. These are usually enumerated as six:

1. Doubt about the Buddha, his character, his supreme knowledge of insight and attainment.
2. Doubt about his teaching, the adequacy of the Noble Path leading to deliverance, and the possibility of realisation thereof.
3. Doubt about the Order, i.e. whether there ever have been fully accomplished disciples, or about the fruitfulness of entering the Order.
4. Doubt about the training (*sikkhaya kankhati*) and its helpfulness in developing virtue, meditation and insight (*adhisīla, adhicittha, adhipanna*).
5. Doubt about the nature of the aggregates of existence (*khandhā*), about the primary elementary qualities (*dhātu*) of matter, and about the organs and fields of senses (*dyatana*).
6. Doubt about the conditionally generated states, and their assignable causation in the doctrine of the twelve links of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*).

Owing to this doubt, based on ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*mohā*), one does not take adequate measures to overcome this perplexity, to solve these doubts; and hence one will not become free from the roots of evil which bind to rebirth. On the other hand, it must be fairly obvious that in daily life there is not only room for reasonable doubt, but even a justification and

a necessity for sceptical enquiry. Not only do dreams and imagination lead us to illusion, hallucination, and distortion, but even our normal physical senses, which are the only instruments of perception, appear to be so unreliable, that great philosophers, such as Berkeley, denied the existence of a physical world different from our ideas. This led him to maintain that there is nothing but the mind and its content, thereby giving those objects of consciousness a reality of subsistence in the consciousness of God. From a more materialistic, philosophical viewpoint it would appear to be more reasonable to doubt not the actuality of the sense-impressions, but their interpretation as given by the mind.

Now, this doubt which is a hesitation to accept things at their face-value, cannot be introduced during a dream-state, because the physical senses are at that time not functioning and are, therefore, not able to check the working of the image-fanning mind. Thus, there is no logic in dreams, no order of sequence, no explanatory detail, but an apparently direct understanding of conditions and motives, which makes doubt impossible. And so, the possibility of doubting is one of the clearest symptoms of being awake, of the functioning of the intellect. And neither illusions nor hallucinations need be the cause of actual deception and do not even give rise to a theoretical problem, as the physical defects which are their origin can easily be rectified by means of change of position, of light, of lenses, etc.

The fundamental error in reasoned thinking is the search for the absolute, either as God, or 'self', or truth. Once it is realised that a search in respect of, or relative to, the absolute is an absurdity, then the absence of absolute certainty also, ceases to be a problem. It is not uncertainty which is a problem; but the search for security and certainty creates the problem of the 'relative' wanting to become the 'absolute'. Abandoning the search for absolute certainty, being a search for security in conflict, one can live with an open mind and with insecurity, and yet be without conflict.

It is not only the feeling of uncertainty, the state of undecidedness, which makes for uneasiness of insecurity, but it is also a hesitation to believe and to trust. This kind of doubt, which is a lack of trust, is the perplexity of a bewildered mind as well as a state of self-opinionatedness, the result of a closed and conditioned mind. This kind of doubt then is a real hindrance to understanding, for it refuses to be open and see, investigate and find out. There is a great difference between a doubting mind and an open mind; for a doubting mind is already more than half closed, half convinced of its own views and opinions, and is therefore not sensitive and alert to any other view, or to see things as they are with an unprejudiced mind. In a doubting mind the various views are entangled and the mind is confused. Any action taken in such a bewildered state of mind can only complicate matters for there can be no clear understanding and hence no free and independent action.

It is not a question or a problem how to get rid of doubt, for such a question merely betrays an anxiety to escape from the problem. It is this anxiety for solving the problem which prevents its solution. Facing the issue, there must be an undisturbed quiet to contemplate the issue, for it is not the truth or untruth of somebody's statement which has to be investigated, but the fact of my mind being in doubt, which is the truth. When I see my doubt as a refusal to be open, then there is no further search for certainty, but I begin to see what is, setting aside what I might think or not think that should be done. In this direct view with an unconditioned mind, without searching for a solution or an ideal, there is a calm sensitivity without plan or purpose, in which there is an immediate contact of clear perception, in which there is no doubt and hence no choice and from which direct action flows without indecision, perplexity, fear or conflict.

Still, there is a way of certainty which is not of achievement. In Buddhism, at every crucial moment, can be discerned an approach of negative thinking. One may not be certain of the meaning and contents of the truth, because the truth as an abstract concept has no relationship with actuality; it is not an object of knowledge. But a falsehood can be known immediately. And

on this basis of knowing the false as false, a dismissal of the false is possible. When, however, a disinclination to believe is replaced by an inclination to disbelieve, there remains a mental alertness, which is far more promising than mere logical deductions. Because in such mental alertness lies the germ of intuition which is understanding not come through the senses. It is a direct experience, which is neither sensed nor perceived, which is not conceived or thought about, but which is an immediate realisation, holding good only for that moment.

It is the perfect enlightenment of a Buddha and an arahant which casts out not only all perplexity, but even the possibility of doubt, the possibility of wilful scepticism, in the knowledge that insight has been reached, that the perception of sannā is also the wisdom of pannā.



## Chapter 2

# The Five Ecstasies

Before dealing in detail with the different states of ecstasy or mental absorption (*jhāna*) as they respectively induce an inhibition of the corresponding mental hindrances (*nivaraṇā*), a description of the progress of mind-culture (*bhavanā*) in the chronological order of events, will be useful. As the choice of location, object of concentration and preparation of seat and clothing are entirely to be suited to the individual's inclination and character, they cannot be discussed here in a general survey. They constitute the 'workshop' (*kammaṭṭhāna*); and some guidance from one with a practical outlook would be useful in directing one's choice.

A solitary place, the absence of noise and distraction are naturally to be recommended. The position of the body should be such that the mind can forget that there is a body, but excess comfort should not be allowed to induce drowsiness, and a dreamy state mistaken for trance. A fit body and an alert mind are prerequisites.

There are forty objects of concentration, and one should select one according to one's temperament. All of them lead up to the preliminary stage of mental culture (*parikamma bhavanā*). The object to be contemplated is called the preliminary symbol or the mark for preparation (*parikamma nimitta*). This may be a material object like a disk of clay (*pathavi kaṣiṇa*), a circle of fire (*tejo kaṣiṇa*), an aperture for space or light, or simply a coloured flat surface. This is just the instrument to bind the thought and to prevent it from wandering about distractedly. In themselves these devices have no value, no ethical or mystical significance, and one does not meditate on them, except in the original sense of contemplation, i.e. watching them with mindfulness.

When one has perceived the mark or symbol thoroughly, one will have made of it a mental concept or picture. When this mental image is so complete that it is an exact copy of the original material object, the device can be done away with and contemplation continues on that mental image, which has all the perfections and imperfections of the original one. This mental image is called the mark for upholding (*uggaha nimitta*). Both these stages belong to the preliminary stage of mental culture (*parikamma bhavanā*).

During the evolution of this stage, while the mind is exclusively occupied with this mental image, the copy in the mind is undergoing a subtle change, whereby it is divested of all its faultiness (*kaṣiṇa dosā*). This renewed concept is now called the transformed after-image or the mark equivalent (*patibhaga nimitta*), for, though it corresponds to the original, yet it is far from identical with it, as all imperfections and disturbing and distracting elements have disappeared. This mark is a conceptualised image, a sublimated concept, and is, therefore, different for each individual according to the impression made on his mind, and received according to his mental capacity and disposition. From this moment the preliminary stage of mental culture has changed into the accessory stage of concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*).

This stage, also called 'neighbourhood concentration', is the transitional period from normal

to supernormal consciousness. Out of the forty types of meditation there are ten exercises which cannot lead the contemplative beyond this stage of neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*).

They are the eight recollective concentrations (*anussati*): on the Buddha, on his teaching (*Dhamma*), on the Order founded by him (*Sangha*), on virtue (*silā*), liberality (*cāga*), celestials (*devā*), on peace (*upasamā*) and on death (*māraṇā*); and the two single exercises, namely the notion of the loathsomeness of material food (*ahare patikkula-sannā*) and the analysis into the four elementary material qualities (*catudhatu-vavatthana*). The objects of these ten concentration-exercises, being prescribed for either a devotional temperament (*saddhā-carita*) or for one with discursive tendencies (*vitakkā-carita*), appear to contain many possibilities for distraction, which might prevent the contemplative to rise to supernormal consciousness.

This transitional period is called access-concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), because it leads with four steps up to full ecstatic apperception (*appanā javanā*). They are four thought-moments, all belonging to one single unit of thought, which culminates in full absorption or ecstasy (*jhāna*). The first moment is a preparatory step (*parikamma*) which is, however, only found in persons who are either tyros in the sphere of mental culture or who are slow of comprehension. The second moment is the access (*upacāra*) to ecstasy, the approach to absorption in the neighbourhood of the supernormal. It is this moment which has given its name to the whole transitional period. In the third moment a final qualification (*anulomā*) equips the mind for absorption with insight that leads to emergence from the toil of the distressful path (*dukkhā-patipadda*). Now, this emerging qualification, which makes the climber rise above the clouds surrounding the lower regions of the mountain, is followed by the fourth thought-moment of adoption (*gotrabhū*), or regenerating apperception, where all sense pleasures are discarded and the lofty mental state (*mahaggatā*) of absorption is chosen instead. It is truly a spiritual regeneration in which a new kinship is adopted of a higher ethical nature, kinship with the holy ones (*ariyā*) on the Noble Path. And herewith ceases the access-concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), which is immediately followed by full concentration (*samma-samādhi*), when in the fifth thought-moment ecstasy (*appanā*) is experienced.

The following table will give an unbroken view of the process:

A.	<i>Parikamma samādhi</i> 1. <i>parikamma nimitta</i> 2. <i>uggaha nimitta</i>	preliminary mental culture preparatory symbol mark for upholding
B.	<i>Upacara samādhi</i> 3. <i>patibhaga nimitta</i> a) <i>parikamma</i> b) <i>upacāra</i> c) <i>anulomā</i> d) <i>gotrabhū</i>	access concentration transformed after-image preparation access qualification adoption
C.	<i>Samma-samādhi</i> e) <i>appanā</i>	right concentration ecstatic apperception

The most dangerous point, where many stagnate to perish, is the moment of the ‘appearance’ of the transformed after-image (*patibhaga nimitta*). The preliminary stages of mental culture have by this time successfully been passed and then for the first time the mind is free from disturbance, and sees the object of its contemplation in the perfect light of its own conception. Even if the original object (*parikamma nimitta*) would have been fearful like a bloated corpse, the transformed and conceptualised after-image might give the impression of a healthy person in peaceful slumber after a hearty meal (Vis. M. II). The dull disk of clay might be conceived as a lovely scenery at night when the full moon appears from behind some clouds. It is not only the image which appears transformed, but the contemplative will feel himself too as transported; and

easily he may now fall for the illusion of having attained the goal, the summit of perfection, while real concentration has only been approached (*upacāra samādhi*). In such a deceiving mood the after-image will be admired and enjoyed and thus one will stagnate on the road. Much confusion has been caused perhaps by authors who were guided mostly by their imagination. They speak of the light to be seen so much that the beginners in mind-culture are on the look-out for the light, expecting it day by day, till in their reverie they have created what they wished.

The transformed after-image (*patibhaga-nimitta*) may be having the appearance, or rather giving the impression of light. But, Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhi Magga* fully stresses the point that the after-image “has neither colour nor shape”. It is a conceptualised image. And, if illustrations are used of a full moon, of a mirror, of white cranes, etc., these objects are not seen, not even in imagination. But the mental impression of peace and tranquillity one gets, when beholding the full moon appearing from behind some clouds, has similarity with the peace and tranquillity impressed on the mind when the state of absorption is approached (*upacāra-samādhi*). Then this after-image may be equivalent to a fleecy woollen blanket, illustrating the sense of mental ease and comfort at the disappearance of all disturbances; or to a candle-extinguisher, exemplifying the feeling of safety in being completely out of from all intrusion; or to anything which might give an impression equivalent to the mental state at the threshold of ecstatic concentration. The great warning to be given here then is: not to expect anything! Any expectation is bound to bring about a mental agitation (*uddhaccā*), and that is the strongest obstacle and hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) to the tranquillisation of the mental process. Hence the conceptualised or transformed after-image as a mark equivalent (*patibaga nimitta*) has nothing of an appearance, which can be sensed in any way by anyone of the five bodily senses. If, therefore, in the course of mental culture (*bhavanā*) such ‘appearances’ would occur, they are a sure sign of a wrong track, which, if followed, will cause much delay and even ultimately may lead to disaster, but certainly never to attainment. A cool head is never so necessary as in the culture of the mind.

The path which leads to the different states of mental absorption (*jhāna*) and the inhibition of the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*), is called the path of calm or tranquillity (*samathā*), because it lulls the passions. But inhibition or tranquillisation is not overcoming or uprooting. In this respect, the mental culture along the way, of tranquillisation (*samathā bhavanā*) cannot be the culmination of right concentration (*samā-samādhi*) and the attainment of the final goal of the noble eightfold path (*ariyā-atthangika maggā*). This can only be done by meditation which is insight (*vipassanā*).

The purpose of *jhāna*-practice is to provide an essential method of mental discipline where-with to attain rebirth in a corresponding Brahma world (M. II. 37) or for the sake of obtaining the supernormal powers, called *iddhī*, clairvoyance, remembrance of previous lives, etc. (D. I. 3). But, *jhāna* is not essential for realising the four Noble Truths. At best, mental absorption is irrelevant to the goal, although it may be important as a means to achieve one-pointedness of mind (*citt’ekaggatā*), which is conducive to the subduing of the hindrances to insight-meditation. Yet, on the other hand, such mental tranquillity may become itself an obstacle and prevent further progress, when the meditator may prefer to extend and to renew these absorbing pleasures, rather than take the other road to insight.

The forty methods of mind-culture are grouped in different classes according to their various objects which should agree with the varying temperaments. Thus there are ten objective concentration courses which present to the mind several forms and colours, first in concrete and subsequently in abstract concepts. There are the ten subjective themes, chosen according to one’s emotions, on the Buddha, his teaching, the Order, on heavens, or virtue, on the body and its parts, on breathing, etc. There are also ten concentrations on the progressing states of decomposition of a corpse. And there are concentration exercises on the sublime states of loving

kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇa*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). All of them are conducive to tranquillity (*samathā*) and hence to the weakening of stimuli, both internal and external, especially if developed to the level of mental absorption. In total concentration (*samādhi*), however, it is not possible to be aware of the conditioned existence, origin and cessation of anything outside this focus on the object of the trance. It is then in such state of absorption that there is no place for lust and malice, for sloth, worry and doubt, because the mental faculties in which these passions arise and obstruct, are not functioning. In such a state of absorption the emotions cannot be roused and formed into hindrances. Still, the type of concentration is one of exclusion, but not of solution. The emotions of love and hate may not function, owing to the mind's preoccupation with loftier ideals, but although temporarily transcended, the passions are not extinguished.

It cannot be over-emphasised that the aim of jhāna concentration is never the attainment of the deliverance of Nibbāna, because they are found, as it were, in different paths. Concentration (*samādhi*) leads to peace of mind in tranquillity of the passions, whereas the road to deliverance is the path of insight (*vipassanā*), where the passions are totally overcome (*khiṇāsavā*). Jhāna leads to suspension of thought and feeling (*sannā-vedayita nirodhā*), but insight leads to the cessation of thought. The system of mental absorption (*jhāna*) may appear a system of sublimation, but it is not one of solution. This will be better understood when we consider the five stages in greater detail, according to the Suttas, the Abhidhamma and the commentaries.

Originally, there appear to have been recognised only four stages of concentration and absorption in the world of form (*rūpāvacara*), but later, perhaps for purpose of greater systematisation, one finds the first stage divided into two. So that we now have the following classification:

Discursive thought (*vitakkā*), sustained application (*vicāra*), joyful interest (*pīti*), well-being (*sukhā*) and one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*). These are the distinguished features of the five stages of mental absorption (*jhāna*). In each succeeding stage where the emphasis is on the next characteristic, the earlier one is abandoned.

## 2.1 Discursive thought

The art of reasoning, the mode of arguing, the application of principles by which false arguments and sophistry (*chalavada*) can be detected and refuted, is the art of methodical thinking, ordered deduction, detailed analysis, which are usually grouped under the name of logic (*vitakkā*). This initial application of mind in ordered thinking (*vitakkā*) is the discrimination, the adjustment of attention (*manasikāra*), the fixing and focussing of thought. It lifts the thought up to the object onto which the thought had been guided by attention (*manasikāra*), and hence it operates largely in the process of image making, where it directs the thought to the mental image; in conception it directs the mind towards the idea; in judgement and argument it leads on to the thesis; in doubt it will guide the mind in turn to the two opposing objects; in meditation towards fuller concentration; on the Noble Eightfold Path towards Nibbāna.

This initial application is like the first stroke of a gong and will, therefore, no more be found whenever further mental progress is made. Thus, in the five states of mental absorption (*jhāna*), as experienced in the spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*)—whether they be of actual absorption as karma, or their resultant states (*vipāka*), or ineffective (*avyakata*)—in those states of mental absorption the initial application of logic (*vitakkā*) will only be found in the first state of the various classes in which it occurs. As right, intentional, co-ordinated thinking (*samā-saṅkappā*) it is a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Initial application is a mental factor of all unskilful and skilful thoughts, which occur on the planes of sense (*kāmalokā*). But, because it is application of the mind, it will not combine with consciousness arising through the five bodily senses. But, it is a factor both of recipient

(*sampaṭicchana*) and investigating consciousness (*santīraṇa*), as skilful or unskilful result. This application of mind to any object does, of course, not occur in the formless mental states (*arūpāvacara*), when the mind is not occupied with, any object, but only with abstract ideas; As discursive thinking it is, naturally, directly opposed to delusion (*mohā*), and yet, delusion as well as excogitation make thoughts, arise and thereby lead to instability, delusion through the vagueness of mental application and bewilderment (*parivīyakula*), and excogitation (*vitakkā*) through the multiplicity, of its mental application (*nānappakāra*). Hence both fail in penetration and insight, which is shown also by the fact that even in the state of perplexity (*vicikicchā*) there is an association with this initial mental application (*vitakkā*).

It is, of course, a typical element in investigating consciousness (*santīraṇa*), where the mind examines without judging in simple analysis. Thus, it is perception (*sannā*) rather than conception (*sankara*), presentative rather than representative.

Whereas this discursive thought in the initial application of mind (*vitakkā*) is a component factor (*cetasikā*) in twelve unhealthy active states (*akusalā kammā*) in the spheres of the senses (*kāmāvacara*) and in two resultant states thereof (*akusalā vipāka*); in three skilful results (*kusalā vipāka*) and three indeterminate or ineffective states (*kriyā*); and moreover in twenty-four active, reactive and indeterminate states (*kammā, vipāka, avyakata*) of the mental states called great and beautiful (*maha sobhaṇā*) because they are more aesthetic than ethic, more beautiful than useful—that is in all forty-four mental states in the spheres of sense—the discursive thought in initial application of mind (*vitakkā*) now under consideration is that mental factor (*cetasikā*) which is a component of mental states occurring in the spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*), which are clearly states of mental absorption (*jhāna*). These states are not ‘material’ (*rupā*) in the meaning of being objects of sense experience. But these mental states may have been induced by material objects, such as the earth-device (*pathavi kasīṇa*). But now, by passing into rapt concentration or trance, it becomes an inhibition to a hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) to moral development. And so the five states of ecstasy (*jhāna*) are linked to the five hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) as follows: Sensual desire (*kamā chandā*) is counteracted by one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*); malice (*vyapada*) by joyful interest (*pīti*); sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*) by sustained application (*vicāra*); excitement and worry (*uddhacca-kukkuccā*) by the ease of well-being (*sukhā*); and finally perplexity (*vicikicchā*) by discursive thought in the initial application of mind (*vitakkā*).

These mental states which are described as aloof from sensuous appetites (*vivicc’eva kamehi*: Dh. S. II. 1) and which thus form a moral solitude “born in the aloneness of the mind”, and yet are not immaterial (*arūpa*), can only be understood as mental reflections, just as beauty is the mental image of external form. These spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*) are then fivefold according to the five states of mental absorption (*jhāna*), and the material (*rupā*) in them is the abstract form of the experience of the senses. Thus in the sphere of pure form (*rūpāvacara*) all sensuous conditions (*kamā*) have been passed (D. III. 275) and the sense-desires of the lower nature known as defilements (*kilesā*) are temporarily inhibited, the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) are lulled to sleep, for which reason these states are called the states of tranquillisation (*samathā*).

The exercises of concentration could then lead to an abstraction which in its first stage of absorption may be merely resulting from a process of formal logic. Here the mind will employ discursive thought (*vitakkā*) to make the mind agreeable and amenable, to be followed and joined by greater and more sustained application (*vicāra*). But, a discursive tendency (*vitakkā*) may easily become a speculative tendency, where higher truths are merely analysed for one’s intellectual satisfaction without being lived and realised. Even so, there may develop an absorbing interest to the exclusion of all other concern. Thus with the casting out of the hindrances there is induced the means of attaining quietude. It is part of the culture of tranquillity (*samathā bhavanā*).

Although the hindrance of sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*) is foremost, due to its pervading

passion, yet it is perplexity (*vicikicchā*) which has to be overcome even before the lust and hate of the senses. And that is the effect of this first stage of absorption (*jhāna*) in the ecstasy of intellectual satisfaction through discursive thinking. Knowing the nature of the hindrance of perplexity (*vicikicchā*) and the strength of speculative thought (*vitakkā*) in counteracting this undesirable state of indecision, it is in the heat of argumentation that the mind becomes absorbed in its own reasoning process of logical thinking, through advancing and maintaining a proposition, leading to the demonstration or the proof thereof. Such proposition to be maintained is posited in advance and is therefore called a thesis; and with methodical reasoning the arguments are induced to prove what has been stated.

Now, what does all this mean psychologically? A statement is made, a statement is argued, a statement is proved. The statement has obviously some value, mostly psychological, as it is not just a passing thought or observation. It has value, not in itself perhaps, but for those who want to argue the case to obtain maximum assurance. That is the whole point of arguing: to prove that something which is highly valued is also right and true.

Thus, one can argue about the wrongs and rights of smoking. But the psychological fact underlying the argumentation is that one wants to smoke for some sort of satisfaction, taste or prestige, and at the same time wants to give up smoking for reasons of health or economy. Not knowing the real reasons, one searches for good reasons in argument. And as one knows in advance what is wanted (the thesis), it should never be too difficult to find good reasons for getting it. But the real reason for argumentation is to provide for one's own satisfaction good and sufficient reasons or excuses for doing what one wants to do, for getting what one wants to get, whether these are metaphysical proofs for the existence of God, the beginning of creation, the continuation of Samsaric evolution, or just the sociological arguments to convince oneself by soothing one's conscience that capital punishment should be maintained as a deterrent for grave crime.

When it becomes clear that the devious ways of the process of thought are based on deeper and hidden motives, it is obviously imperative to clear thinking that the mind be free from all conditioning of past customs and tradition. Only an open mind can be free. And only a free mind can see things independently as they are, without judging as to what should be. In direct thinking there is understanding and the freedom of direct action with insight. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the ecstasy of living free is the limitation put on the mind by thought. And so, discursive thinking, analytical thinking, logical thinking provide pleasures which are not of the physical senses, and which, therefore, surmount the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) with the ecstatic pleasures of satisfaction in the conquest by the mind; but in that very conquest lies also its binding power. The rapture of discovery, of revelation, of surmounting matter by thought, can be very intense indeed, to the point of total forgetfulness and unawareness of physical needs and surroundings. That, however, is a breaking away from relationship into isolation, which becomes all the more harmful, because isolation is a kind of escape from relationship; and that kind of self-seeking is an attempt to escape from conflict. But as the conflict is just that opposition in relationship, an escape into mental isolation of a trance-like existence can only increase the opposition without solving the conflict. This will result in an intensified search for greater comfort in fuller ecstasy, and thus lead into the second trance of sustained application. (*vicāra*).

## 2.2 Sustained Application

Sustained application of thought (*vicāra*) is necessary at this stage, for complacency with the progress made so far can easily lead to mental sloth (*thīna*) and physical torpor (*middha*), bringing about stagnation instead of progress. In this sustained application there is no more

need of initial, analytical, deductive thought (*vitakkā*), and the emphasis and characteristic is from now on to preserve, maintain and increase this spiritual interest, till it can grow into a delightful zest and spiritual joy (*pīti*), the object of the third stage of absorption (*jhāna*).

Physical and mental laziness, the hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) of indolence (*thīna-middha*), which was discussed earlier, can be overcome by concentration on the various postures of the body. Thus, concentration on walking, on the physical reaction of the body, will keep both body and mind alert. The guidance of thought towards a concentration-object can be dispensed with, but the progress of the process, set in action by initial thought (*vitakkā*), has to be maintained. It is not just the continuation of the original reverberation of the bell after being struck, for this stage is essentially a sustenance of that initial movement. It is characterised by examination of details, and hence it largely operates in the investigating consciousness (*santīraṇa*). While initial application (*vitakkā*) grasps the object as a whole, such as seeing a person in the distance without knowing whether that one is a man or a woman, so sustained application (*vicāra*) will distinguish the qualities of being virtuous or not, rich or poor, noble or humble (Vis. M. viii.). Applied thought in the beginning stage merely considers and observes; but sustained application searches and investigates. When drawing a circle with a compass, the fixing of one point in the centre is like initial application, while the drawing of the circumference with the other point is sustained application (Atthas. I. iv. 1).

We may continue this simile a little further: when the circumference is drawn, the circle will remain even when the point in the centre is withdrawn. Even so, application can remain as investigation (*vicāra*) without the further help of repeated initial application (*vitakkā*). This happens in the second state of mental absorption (*jhāna*) in the spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*), where the mind is calmer and freer, and less excited than in the initial state of absorption.

Sustained application of mind (*vicāra*) will, therefore, occur in all classes of thought or mental states where initial application (*vitakkā*) is found, but not vice versa.

It is a mental factor (*cetasikā*), which although not occurring in each and every thought, can be found frequently in combination with healthy and unhealthy factors. It is only in the spheres of the abstract and formless (*arūpāvacara*) that the movement of thought is totally absent, as also in the further three stages of trance, when thought in any form has given way to the ecstasies of joy, of peace and evenmindedness (*pīti*, *sukhā*, *ekaggatā*). This sustained application of thought (*vicāra*), therefore, combines with resolve (*adhimokkhā*) as well as with perplexity (*vicikicchā*), although these two can never combine in one thought. In itself, therefore, it appears to be insignificant, but its supporting qualities are great, for better or for worse. It has its place inrecipient or presentative cognition (*sampaṭicchana*), which is the act of mental perception, i.e. the acceptance of impression. It is an aid in the process of investigating consciousness (*santīraṇa*), which is the reflex-idea through which there is recognition of the sense-objects.

It is the trance-like quality of continued application of thought which binds the subjective mind to its object so much that there is full concentration at the work at hand. It is that absorbing quality which makes a poet see and say things which a distracted mind will never think of. It is the absorbing quality of the scientist, of the inventor, of the philosopher, who emotionally and intuitionally feel where thought is leading them, even before they are able to express that feeling in words, in figures, in deeds. Thus they feel the need to sometimes use symbols to represent their emotions, abstractions to represent the concrete they cannot express. But abstractions as well as emotions are still mind-made and hence subject to all the limitations and restrictions of reason and thought. Still, these abstractions are free from the basic forms and rules of material activity and thereby acquire a kind of spiritual quality which is not to be apprehended by the senses and their pleasures. Hence their place is in the beginning of the spheres of form (*rūpāvacara*), where the material senses (*kamā*) do not function, and where pure abstractions (*arūpa*) have not developed yet.

Sustained application of thought (*vicāra*), however, might develop into attachment to opinions, and hence become stubbornness, which is the very same hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) of indolence (*thīna-middha*), which it is supposed to counteract. It is a beautiful example of how extremes can meet again, how in a search for escape one may get caught into the identical trap from which release was sought without understanding. Stubbornness is a kind of indolence which is occasioned by fear of consequences, and which, therefore, attaches itself to tried-out methods of past experiences, a refusal to see, to give up, to discover. This is always the lurking danger in the experience of absorbing satisfaction when the intermediate stages of the trance are mistaken for attainment of the final goal. Then, of course, there will be no further application and investigation, or understanding and development of deeper insight into the nature of this second stage of absorption. And without that there will be merely the conceit in the delusion of attainment.

Silence of speech is necessary to reach the threshold of mental concentration, and silence of discursive thought is necessary to reach that sustained application of mind, which, however, may lead to the lethargic satisfaction of having overcome all obstacles to concentration. It is this silence of which the Buddha spoke, when admonishing his monks either to engage in spiritual conversation or to observe a noble silence (*ariyā tunhībhaṇa*: M. I. 161), when all mental babbling ceases with the ending of reasoning, as identified thus by Maha Moggallāna.

## 2.3 Ecstatic Joy

Rapturous delight (*pīti*) is the third exalted state of ecstasy (*jhāna*) which has now left behind all discursive and intensive thinking (*vitakkā-vicāra*). From the outset this state should not be confused. with the delight of sense-satisfaction (*kāmacchanda*), which is one of the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) experienced in the spheres of the sensuous (*kāmāvacara*) and still to be overcome and stilled in tranquillity of mind (*ekaggatā*). But it also should be watched not to become an obsession of attainment, for when the mind remains solely occupied by one idea, however pleasant that may be, it can easily become morbid in this fixation on joy. Then spiritual joy as a stepping stone for detachment from the senses may become a source of attachment to the things of pure form and beauty. Then it may become a religious trance or a poetic exaltation with physical insensibility, with a partial suspension of vital functions; a self-induced hypnotic state which could lead to a delirious agitation or mental frenzy, a temporary insanity. This is no doubt, the reason why the sacred books of various religions insist so much on the necessity of guidance, a spiritual leader, a guru.

Such states of mental intoxication can be induced, however, without any religious connection by means of hallucinatory drugs, which were known for ages in China and India, and which in different forms are coming more and more in use in the West. Although they certainly produce the desired effect of a quick trip out, they never give more than a momentary knock-out without any solution of the problems they seek to escape. The degree, the method, the result may differ, but essentially they are all escapes from the actual, whether they are religious states of mental absorption in prayer and concentration, or the crude ways of escape through physical insensibility.

The ecstasy of living is not to be found in an escape from life, but rather in meeting it with an open and unconditioned mind. Only when thought is free from regrets and ideals, when thought does not select its own ideas for concentration and escape, then there can be a rapturous delight (*pīti*) in the discovery of what is new at every moment in our relationship, in our reaction, in the actuality of living. In such direct understanding there is great tenderness and sensitivity, which allows the approach to what is new without prejudice, without conflict, without escape. That is living in the joy and in the ecstasy of love.

The purest kind of joy (*pīti*) is that found in the inoperative mental state (*kiriya-cittā*) which

can arise only in one who is ‘purged of the intoxicants’ (*khiṇāsavā*), that is, in an arahant; for he alone can have joy and not be reflected by it. It is, e.g., the happiness of the mind experienced when seeing a secluded spot suitable for concentration of mind; or when the happy thought arises, on hearing the aimless noise people in the world make, that he has overcome all craving for that; or as a reflection on previous action. Such awareness may produce a smile (*sitā*), but no more than the beginning of laughter (*hasituppada*), “consisting in the slight-movement of the lips, not enough to reveal the tips of the teeth”.

Being purely mental, this delightful interest (*pīti*) should not be confused with pleasant feelings (*sukhā-vedanā*), for there can be rapturous joy in the mind without this feeling at the senses of the body. Delight is experienced as anticipated satisfaction and gives thus the necessary interest in the object. As such it is much more intense than the happiness of well-being (*sukhā*), for, it has the thrill of expectation which the actual possession lacks; it is not marred by fear of possible loss, because the desired object is not actually obtained yet; and it is entirely intellectual and one of the mental formations (*saṅkharā*), while the sensation of happiness (*sukhā-vedanā*) is a kind of physical feeling to which the mind reacts. The two are compared to the emotions experienced by a traveller in the desert: one is the zestful joy (*pīti*) on hearing of the vicinity of a natural lake, the other is the bliss of well-being (*sukhā*) after bathing and drinking.

This delight (*pīti*) is to the other concomitant mental factors as the lubricating oil in a machine. Owing to the anticipated delight of motherhood a woman will bear up again and again the pangs of childbirth; in nearing his destination the traveller will forget his fatigue; the neighbourhood of the stable makes even the tired horse run again. All this shows delight as mental and not purely emotional.

Five kinds of joy are distinguished: a thrill of joy; a flash of joy like lightning; a flood of joy as when a river breaks its dykes and inundates the country; transporting joy which could even lift the body in the air; all-pervading joy which is overwhelming and suffusing. This delightful interest is usually shown as a good quality, but it should be well noted that it can also occur in unskilful action (*akusalā kammā*). In that case, it will always combine with greed (*lobhā*) owing to its nature of expectation. It is, of course, not to be found in any mental state where there is grief (*domanassā*) or indifference (*upekkhā*) with which mental states it is incompatible. Also it is not in those states of mental absorption (*jhāna*) which have transcended joy, viz. the fourth and fifth stage, where respectively ease (*sukhā*) and one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) are predominant. Thus it will not be found in the formless spheres (*arūpāvacara*), where the concentration of mind is so pure and subtle that even spiritual joy will there find no place, as being too gross. Its difference from well-being (*sukhā*) gives it a place all of its own and full of charm; for, where the feeling of well-being must be naturally somewhat subjective, the mental factor of delight (*pīti*) can be also with regard to others; and then, it will be combined with and almost synonymous with sympathetic joy (*muditā*).

Many are the shapes and shades which occasion various degrees of joy, and not all of them skilful. The source of joy need not necessarily be a good or healthy one (*kusalā*); for, delight may find its interest even in its own misery, thereby deriving satisfaction from the compassion of others. In such a mental state there may be a combination of morbidity (*thīna-middha*) or indolence to overcome sorrow, in order to indulge in the gratification of others’ commiseration, which is then felt as a satisfactory experience.

The beginning of joy (*pāmojja*) arising from confidence and trust (*saddhā*) will turn into sheer delight (*pīti*), which again will make place for a serene tranquillity of mind (*passaddhī*), according to a chain of dependent origination leading out of conflict (*dukkhā*) into the realisation of deliverance, (*vimutti*) with insight in the extinction of all conflict and delusion (*khaya-nana*).

Although as a mental factor (*cetasikā*) this pleasurable interest may contain much selfishness, it can also flourish in the pursuit of a skilful objective, when it will be found in combination with

sympathetic joy (*muditā*). Then it is the highest or purest form of three kinds of love: active love (*mettā*), preventive love (*karuṇa*) and unselfish love (*muditā*), the last one being as a mother's joy and pride in the good qualities of her promising son. But the degree of unselfishness even in this sympathetic joy (*muditā*) seems to be subject to further interpretation, as a mother's sympathy is certainly based on the fact that the child is her own. An unbalanced state of mind in perplexity (*vicikicchā*) is, however, always precluded from association with interest (*pīti*) even of the lowest type.

This third stage of mental absorption in the sphere of pure form (*rūpajjhāna*) having passed both initial and sustained application of thought (*vitakkā-vicāra*), is then characterised by this delightful interest (*pīti*), which is an all-pervading rapture, overwhelming and suffusing (*pharana-pīti*). At this stage all discursion will have ceased, the object which originally induced the mental absorption might even be lost sight of. Hence this stage of concentration is said to be subjective (*ajjhātā*), that is, produced in one's personality (*attano jata*), when even physical pain fails to produce mental grief (*domanassā*). It is in this purified atmosphere of selfless delight that the hindrance of ill-will (*vyapada*) cannot function, and it is obviously this absence of all hateful feeling which makes sympathetic joy (*muditā*) so closely related to this spiritual, unselfish and ecstatic joy (*pīti*).

As we shall see further when dealing with the trances characterised by ease (*sukhā*) and even-mindedness (*ekaggatā*), there is no delightful interest (*pīti*) in those higher stages, where its place has been taken by disinterestedness and impartiality (*tatra-majjhātatha*). Also in the several stages of ecstasy in the formless spheres of abstract thought (*arūpāvacara*) there is no experience of joy which is the delight of love.

To most people joy is the opposite of unhappiness. But that alone shows already that they do not know happiness, but only the experience of unhappiness. And the unhappiness they know is dissatisfaction, the inability to find gratification. Thus they seek happiness as if that were gratification. Without knowing it, they seek it according to the image they have formed in their desire for gratification. Gratification they know, for that is pleasure of the senses, of the mind, of the dream, of power, of the will, of the ideal; it is self-gratification. And as long as the 'self' is not satisfied there is unhappiness. But does that mean that the opposite is true, that self-gratification is happiness? Is not this very striving for self-gratification leading to conflict, to opposition, to exploitation, all in favour of 'self'?

Thus to experience happiness is not the same as to know its opposite. But do we know the opposite? Is happiness the opposite of unhappiness? And do we truly know what unhappiness is? What we know is the experience of self-frustration; but do we truly know what this frustration is? Is it not the inability to attain the ideal, the projection of a picture based on immature memories, which have been retained to form a basis for an ideal self, a continuation in the future, a source of security? When thus the nature of this 'ideal' is truly understood, the non-attainment thereof cannot cause frustration. And no search is possible in an opposite direction, because there is no opposite, a search for which would equally be the search for another ideal, leading to renewed frustration.

In this understanding, all desire for gratification is meaningless; and there just is no place for dissatisfaction when there is no ideal, no 'self', no search for pleasure. When all that ceases there is the supreme peace of happiness, without opposite, without conflict, without 'self'. Such is the state of mind one cannot know, for knowledge is never an experience, and in experiencing this absorbing trance, there is no knowledge which is memory, which is reflection, which is 'self'.

And that brings us to a state of mind of which we are not aware, a state of ease, which is to the mind as health to the body.

## 2.4 The Ease of Well-Being

We have seen already that there can be rapturous joy (*pīti*) without the feeling of happiness (*sukhā-vedanā*); When, therefore, we meet with the satisfaction of well-being after the rapture of joy has been surpassed, it is obvious that this is not just a sensation of happy satisfaction and neither a factor or component (*cetasikā*) of a happy state of mind.

Ease (*sukhā*) is indeed a peace beyond thought and feeling. As feeling (*vedanā*) is found as an essential constituent of any thought (*sabba-cittā-sadharana*), it can be pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent. Then it merely follows contact (*phassā*) and precedes perception (*sannā*); then it is a sense experience which will be stored as memory (*sannā*) from which the mind will make up ‘thought’ with its manifold components (*sankharā*) before becoming a full-grown, conscious and volitional experience (*viññāna*), with responsibility for action and reaction (*kāmaṇipāka*).

A feeling of the senses, that is, a sensation (*vedanā*), can have as its object of sensitivity either pleasure (*sukhā*), pain (*dukkhā*), or neutral feelings (*adukkha-m-asukha*), in which distinction pleasure means the experience of a desirable sense-object. If excitement is added to this experience, it becomes joy (*somanassā*). But when both excitement of agitation (*uddhaccā*) and the worry (*kukkuccā*) of desire are subdued, this joy becomes an experience of well-being (*sukhā*), which is ease. And so, the mental factor of sensation (*vedanā*) may be a happy feeling (*sukhā-vedanā*), but the experience of the satisfaction of well-being surpasses all Pleasure and joy (*pīti*). While delightful interest (*pīti*) gives a satisfaction of anticipation and expectation, and is, therefore, more intense and exciting, still, not having overcome the hindrance (*nivaraṇā*) of agitation and the worry which comes from desire (*uddhaccā-kukkuccā*), it cannot experience the bliss of well-being (*sukhā*) which is beyond thought and feeling.

This experience of well-being (*sukhā*) in harmony thus displaces the rapturous joy (*pīti*) of the previous state of mental absorption (*jhāna*); and although it has not attained the quiescence of equanimity, it has neither the excitement (*uddhaccā*) nor the worry (*kukkuccā*) to be found in the rapture of anticipation. As a mental state, therefore, it is the satisfactory experience of attainment and possession, together with the intelligent awareness thereof (*sampajāna*). With it are associated all the general good mental factors (*sobhaṇā sadharana cetasikā*), and it has close connection with compassion (*karma*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and insight (*pañṇā*) while loving kindness (*mettā*) is there in its form of hatelessness (*adosā*).

Ease is a peace beyond thought and feeling; This peace cannot be made, as an armistice, which is but a preparation for the next attack. It is much more than the absence of disease. Yet that absence is the only thing we know. In health we do not know that we are healthy, because health is not something which can be stored or accumulated as a possession. It is being whole. And so is ease. It cannot be measured, it cannot be created, but when there is the experience of ease there is the ecstasy which knows nothing of ‘self’ in thought or memory. It is in the absence of ‘self’ which is always conflict, that there is the ease of well-being.

There is no opposite to ease, but there are hindrances such as agitation and worry (*uddhaccā-kukkuccā*) which have to be understood. In understanding their nature, their working, their arising, their purpose, there is also understanding of their ceasing. And in their ceasing there is the ecstasy of ease (*sukhā*) in the absence of conflict (*dukkhā*). It is not in resistance that ease can be found, as peace cannot be brought about through war. But, in total negation of conflict, of opposition, of projection in idealism, there is a falling away of delusion. When striving ceases, there is ease; when purpose vanishes, there is no more becoming; when thought comes to an end, there is the peace of ease, the release of deliverance, the ending of demand, the void of greed. And that is the ecstasy of ease, when all is well.

## 2.5 One-Pointedness

The final stage of mental absorption (*jhāna*) in the spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*) leads also to the overcoming of the final hindrance (*nivaraṇā*), which is the lust of the senses (*kāmacchanda*) being subdued by one-pointedness of mind (*citt'ekagatta*). Thus the mind is pacified by the exclusion of the external disturbances and the subjugation of the internal complexes. Even though the five stages are clearly marked, their transition will not always be so easily discernible; and it might not be possible for a mind reaching this height to say exactly where the various stages began and ended, and when the actual transition took place, if not for their clearly distinct characteristics both in attainment and in setting aside the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*).

Thus, the end of thought application (*vitakkā-vicāra*) and the corresponding overcoming of perplexity (*vicikicchā*) and indolence (*thīna-middha*) is clear enough in principle. Likewise the delight in spiritual joy (*pīti*), not admitting any hateful thought (*vyapada*), and the ease of well-being (*sukhā*), subduing the agitated mind (*uddhaccā-kukkuca*) are convincing enough in their broad characteristics. But there would be many border-cases where some agitation will be lurking in the lust of the senses, even when the ease of well-being is made to give way to one-pointedness of thought. The fact that discursive thought and sustained application of thought (*vitakkā-vicāra*) have been shown to have been superseded by spiritual joy (*pīti*) and the ease of well-being (*sukhā*), does not preclude the need of one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) in this last stage for the overcoming of lust (*kāmacchanda*), which was the first and perhaps the most formidable hindrance.

There are several aspects of this mental factor, referred to under various names in the texts and commentaries, with some slight differences, due to combinations, associations, complexes, idiosyncrasies. Thus, one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) is a mental factor which occurs in any thought and then, of course, it cannot have any ethical connotation. According to the Atthasālini, it is another name for concentration (*samādhi*); and as concentration is necessary for any action, in virtue and vice, it is then merely the power of individualisation, of focussing on one centre, of one-pointedness of thought.

But that would not make it right concentration (*samma-samādhi*). In this most general aspect it is one-pointedness which keeps the other mental factors together, whether they be good or bad, just as the ridgepole in a roof keeps all the rafters together (Mil. Panha, I. 60), whether the roof belongs to a shrineroom or to a jail. It naturally follows, as we have seen already, the ease of well-being (*sukhā*), when the mind is at peace (*samathā*) and mental balance (*avikkhepa*) has been obtained. By its objective delimitation, thought receives stability (*thīti*) which is fixity on the thought-object, solidity (*saṇṭhiti*) which causes the combining of associated mental factors, and steadfastness (*avaṭṭhiti*) which means the immersion, the entering into the thought-object. It is this selective individualisation, always found in any class of consciousness (*sabba-cittā sadharana cetasikā*), sometimes as the highly moral aspect of equanimity (*upekkhā*), sometimes characterising the final stage of mental absorption or ecstasy (*jhāna*) in the spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*) as one-pointedness of mind (*citt'ekaggatā*), it is this same factor which maintains this highest stage of absorption, and which steadies the hand of a murderer.

Neither initial nor sustained application of mind (*vitakkā-vicāra*) would be possible without this steadying influence. This steadfastness is common both to one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) and to resolve (*adhimokkhā*), but there is a difference; for, where one-pointedness prevents distraction among the other mental factors, resolve (*adhimokkhā*) prevents the thought from wavering with regard to the object. Hence, one-pointedness can combine with doubt (*vicikicchā*) when it will direct and concentrate all other factors in perplexity, thereby intensifying the doubt; while resolve (*adhimokkhā*) is directly opposed to, and can never associate with doubt. Resolve puts an end to perplexity, where one-pointedness intensifies the doubt.

There is another aspect with a difference. While one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) provides a mental balance (*avikkhepa*) through which all other mental constituents receive stability, whether their object is good or bad, there is, also a lofty mental factor (*sobhaṇā-sadharana-cetasikā*) common to all skilful (*kusalā*) thoughts, but not to be found elsewhere. It is the factor of equanimity (*tatra-majjhata*) which makes the concomitant factors proceed equally, checking both deficiency and excess, thus keeping the process of thought well balanced. Then it prevents the skilful or healthy thought-process to lose its equilibrium by going to extremes. Hence it is called the neutral middle (*majjhata*). Thus it is the same as the sublime state (*brahma-vihara*) of even-mindedness (*upekkhā*), but not the same as that kind of neutral feeling of indifference which is neither painful nor pleasant (*adukkha-m-asukha*) and which belongs to the sphere of sense (*kāmāvacara*), a hedonic indifference which is emotional, even when not stirring the senses.

Equanimity as a lofty mental factor is neither one which holds the middle between pleasant and painful sensations, nor one which holds the middle between the emotions of joy and grief. It is, therefore, more intellectual, and arises with understanding. It is characterised by a sense of justice and impartiality, and reveals itself in the calming down of tendencies (Atthasalini, I. v. 713). Hence it is a factor of enlightenment (*sambojjhanga*) and essentially is dependent on detachment (*viveka nissira*: S. IV. 367). And so it is the characteristic element of this fifth stage of mental absorption (*jhāna*), which is described as “utter purity of mindfulness, which comes of disinterestedness (*upekkhā-satiparisuddhi*), where no ease is felt nor any ill” (Dhs. §. 175).

In relation to the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) which obstruct all progress on the path of perfection, one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) in its full force of concentration is an effective suppression of sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*). The mental state which is described as “aloof from sensuous appetites” (*vivicc’eva kamehi*: Dhs. II. 1) forms thus a moral solitude “born in the seclusion of the mind”, so appropriate of this final and finest ecstasy. In these spheres of pure form (*rūpāvacara*) all sensuous conditions have now been passed (D. III; 275), the sense desires of the lower nature known as defilements (*kilesā*) are temporarily inhibited, the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) are lulled to sleep. And so, in total absorption (*jhāna*) there is tranquillity (*samathā*) which is the chief characteristic of this method of mind-culture (*bhavanā*).

This fifth stage of mental absorption (*jhāna*) has now transcended all bliss of well-being (*sukhā*). Its unbiased attitude of disinterestedness (*upekkhā*) “does not beget partnership with bliss, excellent though it may appear in the previous state of ecstatic absorption” (Atthas I. V. 3). On entering (*upacāra*) this state, mental satisfaction (*somanassā*) has been put away. Bodily pain and its reaction (*dukkhā*) was overcome on entering the first stage of absorption; mental grief (*domanassā*) was overcome subsequently by delightful interest (*pīti*), and the feeling of physical pleasure (*sukhā vedanā*) by the bliss of well-being in the previous stage of absorption. Thus, owing to this perfect equanimity (*upekkhā*), concentration will be complete in one-pointedness of mind (*citt’ekaggatā*).



## Chapter 3

# Sublimation and Beyond

In a process of enquiry through watchfulness, all doubts and discussions, all arguments and discursive thinking are spontaneously relinquished. The ceasing of reasoning, however, does not mean a total negation of mental activity, which is inertia or stagnation. The basis of all true action which is not conditioned reaction is a passive alertness; passive, because thought is not allowed to introduce its memories and imaginings; and alert, because there is no commitment to anything in particular, no dependence on any ideal. Thus there is an open receptiveness, ready to see what comes, to meet any challenge without prejudice. Hence there is calmness in non-reasoning without anxiety and without conformity. It is the end of the urge of the senses (*kāmacchanda*) and of agitation and worry (*uddhaccā-kukkuccā*); it is the end of opposition and aversion (*vyapada*); at the same time here is awakening without indolence (*thīna-middha*); and as there is no anticipation in self-projection, there is no wavering in perplexity (*vicikicchā*).

Under the disturbing influence of the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) the mind was like muddy water in which nothing could be seen and perceived as it is. Under the calming influence of absorption the mind is stilled, and allows for clear reflection and penetration, as in water in a still pool. The reflection however, is not the real, for it is still an image, even though not a distorted image. Thus, insight (*paññā*) is not the result of concentration and absorption. But the stillness of thought allows a spontaneous revelation of truth as it is. When the mind is pure of all defilements (*āsava*), it will not be hindered to see things as they actually are without the intervention of a beclouding self-interest. Then ‘self’ is seen as the reflector in which events are distorted, in which experiences are presented as it were in technicolour, showing not what is actually experienced, but the mind’s reaction thereto. When reason has stopped all argumentation and sustained application of wilful thought, then in that tranquillity appears what is true in itself: the impermanence of all experience, the non-reality of all conflict, the worthlessness of all striving.

It is at such a stage of awakening that the mind would start a process of revaluation of experience. If, whatever has been known so far is now approached anew, avoiding distortion and conditioning, then even the objects of concentration, their impressions, after-images, their limitations, their effects will have to be seen as they are, and not to be judged according to the results produced in ‘me’, the subject, the creator, who has produced them. Thus, the emphasis of concentration is being shifted from the object to the subject, away from the reflected to the reflector. But it is frequently a long way for the ‘self’ to discover that there is no self, even though it seems so near at hand. And so, although with the final attainment of mental absorption in the world of matter, of form, of beauty, the last of the five hindrances on that path of peace has been lulled to sleep, the mind will soon realise that this tranquillity is conditioned and conditional to the continuation of absorption, which is not possible in a material world (*rūpāvacara*). With this appreciation is then felt the need to transcend even the absorbing states of ecstasy, to transcend matter in any form, to transcend form itself.

And thereby one enters the realm of the formless (*arūpa vacara*).

### 3.1 Space

Matter is form (*rupati'ti rupam*). When matter changes, so does form. When matter disintegrates, so does form. And that leaves a vacuum, called space (*akāsa*). Space is not matter, but is dependent on matter. By moving matter, one makes space. Space is dependent on the movement of matter.

In order to understand this meaning of space, we begin to think of space as the vacancy between two objects, or in a room. That would be limited space, and such space is conditioned in its extent, in its very existence, by its boundaries.

By moving the frontiers outwards we increase space. By taking away objects from inside a room, we make more room. But what are we actually doing? First, in order to understand space and control it, we put it in a cage, and then to understand it better we remove the walls of that cage and find space becoming bigger. Then we increase the concept by moving it into outer space, where there are no boundaries. And we think we have discovered infinite space.

But have we understood 'space'?

Space is, as we have seen already, dependent on and conditioned by its boundaries. Can there be infinite space by removing all boundaries? Space is a possibility for occupation. But, by occupying space, we simply annihilated it. Then, what have we done to space? It is clear that space, whether limited or infinite, has no existence of its own. It is always a relative concept, depending on our ideas of making use of it. Thus, space is an idea, a concept, and exists only in our mind.

One can travel in space. Man has gone to the moon. Man-made satellites are travelling to Mars, Venus, Jupiter. In a way there is no limit to space, for one can travel there, if not while being locked up in a capsule, at least through our instruments which bring back to earth more knowledge of the objects in space. We can view those objects in space and thus cross that space. We can make space itself an object of thought, but even then, space will remain an idea, a concept, existing only in the mind, whether it is small, or measureless, or even infinite.

In the canonical texts the sphere of boundless space (*akasanācāyatanā*) is frequently referred to when the various stages of mental absorption are enumerated (e.g. Nipata Sutta, M. I. 159), or when the various stages of the Buddha's mental process are mentioned just before he attained complete deliverance (*parinibbana*; D. II. 112). "With the complete transcending of material perceptions (*sabbaso rūpasannanam sammatikkama*), with the disappearance of the perception of sensory reactions (*pattigha-sannanam atthangama*) and with the non-attention to perceptions of the multiformity of sensuous impressions (*nanatta-sannanam amanasikara*) one becomes aware of just unbounded space (*manta akaso 'ti*) and one enters into and dwells within the sphere of boundless space" (*akasanācāyatanam upasampajja viharati*: Vbh. 245; Vism. x. 12. 273).

Even though the mind cannot contain the infinite, the idea is there, even though distorted in, and restricted by, the finite mind. If space is then conceived as infinite and without limit (*ākāsānañcā*), the sphere (*āyatanā*) of this concept cannot be less than infinite. And thus, this thought which is the concept, the idea of the sphere, is itself without limits; and while thought gets lost in space, space itself is contained in thought.

### 3.2 Thought

If space is conceived as boundless, without limits and infinite, the thought which conceived this concept can then not be less than boundless, without limits and infinite. Thus, without

interruption, the ecstasy of the infinite has now won access to the imperturbable (*anejjappatto hoti*: A. II. 184) and thought sees itself as infinite (*viññāṇānañca*).

What is thought? What is consciousness (*viññāṇa*)? What is one's immediate reaction to this question? Is it not an urge to check up with the texts and the commentaries, as we have done so far so frequently? A check with a reference, however, is not a thought. It is a reaction to what has been said and done before. It is the bringing up of a memory as a memento from a store-house in which are kept all those past selections of experiences. But when an experience is selected to be preserved in memory, it is not an experience at all. In selecting there is a purpose as there is in rejecting; the selection is made with an aim in view, and thus there is no full understanding of the experience. The aim has become the most important; it is the cause of action and according to that aim in view certain events are selected others rejected, in a method of comparing, judging, standardising, always keeping the aim as the supreme judge and measurement. Then experiences, people, events, which are useful in the building up of the 'ego' are accepted, registered, stored and memorised, while those which appear to be harmful to the continuation and expansion of the 'ego' are rejected, discarded, suppressed and forgotten.

Thus, when a question arises, such as: What is thought? the first impulse is a search for a reference from that store of memories, selections favoured for their support of the 'self'. But as I am thinking just now, in an unprejudiced awareness, without dependence on sacred texts or on a teacher's authority, I can see what is happening. I can see my immediate reaction to this challenging question, a reaction to rely on authority, on tradition, on education, on environment. I can see it happening just now. And that is my thinking!

Thought is memory. Thought is selection. Thought is 'self'. It is 'self' that makes thought, and it is thought that makes the 'self'. Then, how to get out of this entanglement? See how thought works. It is even now not concerned with finding out, but only with escape, sublimation, projection. The question of how to get out of this entanglement is made even before an enquiry is held about the nature of this entanglement, which is still the same question: What is thought? If thought is seen and understood as memory, as selection, as investment, as security, that certainly cannot provide an unconditioned response. Only when thought as a search has stopped, can there be an open mind, vulnerable, sensitive, unbiased, unexpecting; and only such a truly still mind can see what is.

Space (*akāsa*) was seen as having something of the character of the infinite, and as such it became an object of concentration leading to a state of mental absorption (*jhāna*) which is formless (*arūpa*). Only the limited has shape and form and other characteristics of matter. But space being only a concept (*paññatti*) can exist only in thought as a possibility of being occupied. It is with such abstract considerations that thought becomes 'lost' in space. In such trance there is a transcending not only of consciousness as knowledge (*vitakkā-vicāra*), but even of sympathetic joy (*pīti*) and the experience of well-being (*sukhā*). It is truly thought-transcending, even though it is not the ending of thought. The suspension of consciousness may give a temporary relief of all pressure, anxiety and conflict, yet it is no more than a suspension which is not a solution.

Then a step further can be visualised and idealised, for, if infinite space is but a thought, it is thought, and not space that is infinite, a thought of sublimation, which, too, is not a solution, but a further escape. It is from this concept of infinity of thought (*viññāṇānañca*) the most sublime ecstasies have resulted. If mind is infinite, not only as an everlasting soul, but as the creator of all abstract thought, encompassing even boundless space, then what is there, apart from mind? Whatever thought arises, it is the mind's creation: "All things are made by mind" (Dhp. v. 1). It is thus that Brahma thinks that he is the creator of the world. And in a way that is so, because the world as I know it, is in myself. This 'self' is the reflector in which all is seen, in which the 'ego' is the creator and the slayer: I am Brahma. I am Shiva; because the

world, as the 'I' sees it, cries out always "Thou art That" (*tat tvam asi*).

But it is the thought which thinks so, which has separated itself from its contents. Yet, there is no thought apart from thinking. Consciousness has no existence of its own, Without being conscious. Hence it is made up by its contents. Mind is made up by thoughts; and thoughts are the reaction, the reflections, the memories, the deductions of and from experiences. But, when an experience becomes an object of thinking, the experience itself is no more, and experiencing has now become an object of thinking about an experience. Such thinking about the past is naturally and necessarily a conditioned reflex, for the process of reflection takes place according to an acquired temperament, acquired education, acquired environment, intentional and volitional selection. Awareness therefore, can only function immediately within the actual experience, which is so immediately actual that there is no time-element of the past, of memory, of reference, of comparison, of a separation within the experiencing between the experiencer as the subject and the experienced object. Thus awareness is a meditation and a contemplation, while thought is a concentration with analysis and deduction, with classification and registration, which make it possible to remember, to recall, to relive an experience, which, however, is never the actual experiencing which occurred in conscious awareness.

What is the difference between consciousness and awareness? Consciousness is thought, and thought is the result of thinking, which is a process of application of the mind with logic and memory, with volition and determination, with judgement and selection, with prejudice and ideals, with fear and hope. Consciousness, in other words, is the 'I' in action, which is reaction, because all thinking is the conditioned result of the entire past, not only the individual past, but the accumulation throughout the ages of the struggles for survival, the interminable wars for emergence, the endless conflicts and strifes, with the ideas of the mind controlling the weapons of the pen and the sword. Consciousness is the past trying to become the future without understanding the past, without knowing the future. Thus consciousness with its thinking is always in conflict and cannot solve any problem, because it does not try to understand.

But awareness is not thinking, is not the memory of the past, is not desire, is not the longing for the future. It is just to be open and receptive to whatever is or happens. There is no approach to the present; the present is here already and we are facing it directly without fear of the past without hope of the future. Awareness is seeing what is as it is, with openness and directness, without expectation of results, without fear of consequences, without reflection as to a 'self' judging in prejudice. It is an immediate experiencing in which there is no reference to 'self' and hence no thought, consciousness, reaction. Unconditioned there is no conflict, no opposition, no 'self'. And where there is no 'self' there is no problem.

The mind, however, has found a marvellous refuge in the sublimation of thought as the infinite, as an abstraction, as the absolute. This process of stripping an idea of all its concrete accompaniments is going on all the time, for it enables the mind to classify events, place them in some same category for easy reference, but without insight or understanding. This process of abstraction has never been so severe as with perceptions which defy all description, such as truth, and beauty, love, the infinite, the absolute, God. Their experiences, helped by memory, require an interpreter or experiencer to make a record. Their repetition is often attempted by, creating similar conditions, but conditioning can only lead to misinterpretation, frustration, confusion and conflict. It is only when thought is utterly silent of preconceived ideas, without desire for capturing an experience, without craving for storing and creating a memorable event, without will for expanding and extending a fictitious 'self', it is in that silence of awareness that the truth of what is can reveal itself, not as an abstract ideal, but as living experience of love.

Abstraction is something of a vision, and, hence, like a trance or absorption of mind, something separated from particular characteristics; it is a mental concept, and not even that, for no mind can conceive the purely theoretical, boundless space, infinite consciousness. We can

pretend to work with it as in pure mathematics; we can presume it to have a value, either moral or ideological; we can profess allegiance to it, religiously or politically. And yet it is a fiction, an imposterous swindle, a non-existent impossibility, to which we submit, for which we slave, which becomes the sole purpose and goal of our existence. We have given names to this abstraction, lofty and vague in its various imaginary aspects. In the name of the nation we stand united and salute the flag; in the name of religion we bow down and worship an idol; in the name of society we restrain ourselves and practise morality; in the name of philosophy we follow a system and search for truth; in the name of meditation we seek the satisfaction of ecstasy. But it is always the individual, the concrete actor in this play, who seeks to forget his fear of loneliness, who tries to bolster up his courage in company, who seeks to drown his ignorance in faith and hope, who attempts to solve his private conflict in the problems of the world. An abstraction, as the absorption of the mind in formless ecstasy, is like the stripping of an individual, and then the clothing of that same individual in the colours of the rainbow.

Just as the understanding of the abstraction of infinite space (*ākāsānañcā*) brought about another abstraction that of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañca*), so the understanding of infinite consciousness, being an abstraction and a sublimation, an escape into the realms of formless ecstasy, can then lead the mind to the understanding that there is no such thing as space, no such thing as thought.

### 3.3 No-Thing

The state of mental absorption (*jhāna*) in the sphere of “nothingness” (*ākīñcaṇṇāyatana*) is the third and penultimate state in the immaterial spheres (*arūpāvacara*) and is brought about “by the total overcoming of the sphere of unbounded consciousness and with the understanding that nothing is there” (*sabbaso vinannancayatanaṃ samatikkama, n’atthi kinci’ti akīncannayatanaṃ upasampajja viharati*: Vbh. 245). This, it is said, is not to be understood as an attempt to make consciousness not arise, cease or disappear (*abhaveti, vibhaveti antarahapeti*: Vism. p. 278, x, 38), but as an attention to its non-existence, its voidness, its secludedness (*natthibavam sunnabhavam vivitabhavam eva manasikaronto*: ibid.).

The immediately preceding stage, the sphere of unbounded, infinite consciousness (*vinannancayatana*), which was based on the concept of boundless space (*ākāsānañcā*) as perceived by consciousness, contains the danger of the misconception of a universal ‘self’, as found in the Upanishads: “I am the absolute” (*aham brahmasmi*). It is to overcome this self-delusion that the sphere of infinite consciousness in the second stage of mental absorption in the immaterial realm has to be totally overcome (*samatikkamāti*).

Akīncannayatana is, therefore, strictly speaking not a sphere of nothingness, but a mental sphere in which the universality of space and consciousness is realised as an empty thought.

In the older texts of the Dīgha and Anguttara Nikāya kīncana has assumed a moral implication of something that sticks, defiles or adheres to the character of a man, and which he must get rid of, if he were to attain a higher moral condition. Thus, it becomes synonymous with the three impurities of lust, hate and delusion (D. III. 217). Thus, kīncana obtains the special sense of being without moral defilement and becomes frequently an attribute of the arahant, owning naught, having naught (*kame akīncano*: A. V. 232).

In the sphere of mental absorption a refinement can be observed in the transition within the material spheres (*rūpāvacara*), where application (*vitakkā-vicāra*), interest (*pīti*) and satisfaction (*sukhā*) are gradually overcome to make room for one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). In the fading away of the material spheres, consciousness dwells in the formless (*arūpa*). Realising the object of infinite space to be a mere mental concept, the state of mind as infinite now becomes the object of the second stage. But, in the awareness of the nature the mind being a mental process

without inherent or abiding entity, this same infinity of space and thought is then seen ‘no-thing’ (*akiñcana*). Thus, not being anything, not be attached to anything, and hence owning nothing, is the immediate fruit of this third stage of abstract concentration.

### 3.4 Non-Perception

This sphere of the voidness, the no-thing-ness (*akiñcana*) of both material space and its mental concept, has also to be abandoned and completely by-passed in order to attain a still more subtle sphere, Where perception itself becomes imperceptible (*n’eva-sannā-n’asannayatana*), the last step before the final attainment of cessation of perception and feeling (*sanna-vedayita-nirodhā*).

But, if mind cannot perceive, how can words explain? This is indeed the silence of thought in which there can be direct communication.

The concept of perception, that is, the idea, the thought of perception, is in a way not different from any other concept, however abstract it may be. Thus the concept of space was derived first from an observation of enclosed space, which on investigation proved to be only a possibility for an object to occupy, or the unoccupied room between some material objects, the space within the walls of a room. Then, by removing the limitations, thought formed an idea of boundless space, in outer space. And ultimately, thought discovered that this was only an idea of space, and not space at all.

Likewise, perception, as the experience, in the mind and by the mind, of an event, has remained as a thought, an idea, a mental picture; and the event which was perceived has remained as a memory whereas both the experience of the event and the event itself have disappeared, leaving only the reaction to that image.

Now, what does the mind do? Either, having nothing else to lay hold of, thought grasps that reaction for the purpose of continuation, and it now experiences its own reaction; or it recognises that the image is not the experience and, letting it go, it just opens itself up without concentration, without desire for grasping any experience; and in that opening up invites whatever event presents itself to the mind, watching all the time its own reaction so as not to get caught by it, through not seeing, perceiving, experiencing and understanding what happens as action or as reaction. For the reaction of the mind is as good an event to watch and to see and to understand as any other event. In that way the mind is free, perception is free, so free that there is no thought or idea about it. Perception is then so simple that it does not introduce a distinction between what is perceived and the perceiver. It is just perception without recognition, without judging, without accepting, without rejecting, without appropriation, without classifying, without memorising, without storing, without reference to a perceiver, to a ‘self’. And that is neither perception nor non-perception (*n’eva-sanna-n’asanna*). It is just the experience of the moment without looking back into the past for identification, without projecting forward into the future for consolidation and securing. And that is the end of concentration and the beginning of meditation, the end of culture and the beginning of insight.

In experiencing there is no thought, no memory, no comparing, no judging, no approval, no rejection, because there is no standard, no thought of ‘self’. It is the end of thought and feeling. But in direct communication there can be direct understanding. And that is love without conflict. For there is no search and no opposition. Thus, it will be clear that the aim of mental absorption is not to produce a state of trance or self-hypnosis. For, there is a heightening of intelligence and vitality which can only lead to greater lucidity and purity of action. It may not be the insight of enlightenment, but there is neither a hypnotic state of self-deception.

The culmination is a suspension of thought and sensory reaction (*sannā-vedayita-niroda*) which is the stillness of thinking, a tranquillity (*samathā*) which characterises this entire exercise. Insight is not the result of this tranquillity; but peace, become absolute in the discarding of

craving and hope, of clinging and fear, is an essential prerequisite for intuition to stand revealed. This discarding is the result of increasing abstraction from space to thought, to no-thing, to non-perception. Yet they do not form the threshold of enlightenment. Wisdom (*paññā*) which is insight may stand revealed in a well-balanced mind, but is not produced by it.

Imperceptible perception (*n'eva-sannā-n'asanna*) is followed by the extinction of the defilements (*āsavakkhaya*), which is the deliverance of arahantship only when there is the realisation of the signless (*animittā*), that is of the non-existence of the permanent (*niccā*), of satisfaction (*sukhā*), of 'self' (*attā*). Enlightenment is not an attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), which last one is the object of this jhanic exercise; but it is the cessation of becoming (*bhavanirodhā*), which is the cessation of attainment rather than attainment of cessation.

Tranquillity is for most the end of the path, for tranquillity gives security. In the enjoyment of satisfaction the mind does not want to move away. It is the end of the search, but not the attainment of the goal. As the entire path of tranquillity and its culture (*samathā-bhavanā*) is aimed at this attainment of cessation (*nirodhā-samāpatti*), it is obvious that from here on the roads will part. Not only from here on, because there is no further progress possible on the path of tranquillity; it is the end of the road, which was tried by the Bodhisatta under his former teachers, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. These states do not really belong exclusively to the teaching of the Buddha, therefore. The efficacy of these states is not denied, but they should not be made the aim of the doctrine. The bodhisatta, too, had to turn round and come to the forking of the roads, which part at the junction of neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhī*) one leading to peace and tranquillity, safety and 'self', the other one to understanding and insight of no-self. That is meditation of insight (*vipassanā*) which cannot be reached through concentration which is the culture of tranquillity (*samathā-bhavana*). Yet, this concentration (*samādhī*) is a path of peace from which the hindrances (*nivaraṇā*) removed, thus leaving the road free for insight to arise.

### 3.5 Insight

This meditation of insight (*vipassanā bhavanā*) does not promise attainments, spiritual powers, supernormal faculties as clairvoyance and remembrance of previous lives. But it shows the present moment in the perception of impermanent (*aniccā-sannā*), in the perception of conflict in impermanence (*anicce-dukkhā-sannā*), in the perception of the void of conflict (*dukkhe-anattā-sannā*). Insight (*vipassanā*) does not solve man's problems by finding a solution, leading from conflict to peace, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. But understanding (*paññā*) will lead from the unreal to the real. Through understanding the unreal, the unreal will dissolve. Then there will be no more conflict; for, conflict will be seen as the unreal, as void, when the conflict which is felt in the impermanent, is seen as the unreal 'self' seeks permanence. In the cessation of striving to become lies deliverance. *Bhava-nirodho Nibbanam*.

Wisdom (*paññā*) is not something one can buy like knowledge through books, through teachers, through school, through correspondence courses, even if they promise to teach transcendental meditation. Wisdom is insight which comes with love and deep compassion. And compassion can come only through direct and full understanding of the fact and the contents of suffering. That is not just the physical pain in the body of others, which can be better attended to by nurses and doctors. It is the pain of conflict in ourselves which we pass on to others because of the chaos in our thinking, acting and living. As long as I am in chaos, I cannot understand my relationship with others. Then I merely try to remedy my chaos, and in this self-concentration I become more aloof, withdrawn and isolated, without even looking at my relationship with others, how I exploit others in my opposition, for my own purpose, for my own security.

It is my conflict which causes the chaos in my action and that causes more conflict in others.

Seeing that, my compassion for others will make me see the cause of that conflict in myself. In this understanding of what is the 'I', there is the beginning of wisdom which comes with love and deep compassion. In this true relationship of love there is no exploitation, there is no thought of opposition, because there is no thought of 'self'. When there is love, there is no self; and when there is no 'self' there is no conflict. But this cannot be taught. Insight is just seeing; but, seeing in fullness with comprehension, with directness, without exclusion or selection, without distortion of prejudice, without hope or fear; then there is no chaos in thinking. And that is wisdom.

In wisdom there is no striving, there is no beyond. The beyond indicates something out of reach, surpassing the present, and therefore, of the future and the unknown. As such it becomes a positive ideal for attainment, for striving, for escaping to the other shore from whatever there is on this side. But it is always an ideal, never to be reached, for on attainment it would cease to be. It shows the chaotic state of a mind, striving for its own annihilation in fear and ignorance of what it is. And yet, this transcendental image offers sufficient impulse to isolate activity of mind in systems and methods of concentration. The 'beyond', which is the goal, is then only an idealised image in which the reactionary 'self' can endure in its selfish isolation, producing thereby more opposition and conflict on this side of the 'beyond'. In striving for the absolute, beyond contradiction and conflict, there is the illusion of the destruction of the 'ego' which would take away the sting of death and the impermanent, only to be led into a much more subtle illusion of immortality and permanence of a higher reality, of a super-soul finding its ultimate reunion with the absolute and the infinite.

Yet, all this is not 'beyond', for it is still within the compass of thought and imagination, even if it is said to be beyond words. The very absolute becomes relative by being thought of as an ideal attainment; conditioned by our striving, by our hopes and desires. Thus, the 'beyond' is just a subtle escape of the mind in fear of what is, a running away from the actual and the real, into the ideal. But the ideal is still the actual, as the mind in hope for the future is the same mind in fear of the present. In understanding the beyond *in* the present (*anicce-dukkhā-sannā*), the attempt at escaping can cease. Then what is can be seen, contemplated and understood, and that is the present, that is the truth which is now free from fear, from desire, from ignorance.

### 3.6 What did the Buddha See?

Under Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, the Bodhisatta learned the highest attainments possible, the third and fourth states of absorption in the spheres of the immaterial (*arūpa samapatti; arupajjhana*). As these trances did not lead him to higher knowledge of insight (*abhinna*), they failed to answer his quest. As we have seen, the states of formless mental absorption follow those of pure form which served the purpose of putting the five hindrances to sleep with a total withdrawal of the mind from the objects and delights of the world, as experienced in logic, beauty, spiritual joy, mental ease and equanimity. The formless ecstasies are transcending all limitations and are based on infinity of space, of thought, of the void, when consciousness becomes so subtle, that its process cannot be discerned any longer. It was the concentration on the void (*akiñcana*) as thought by Alara Kalama which brought about the third step of absorption and ecstasy in the formless spheres, while the fourth stage was taught by Uddaka Ramaputta, in which state there is no more awareness of the functioning of consciousness, although the process is not suspended. Even when these are further developed into a temporary cessation of mental functioning (*sannā-vedayita-nirodhā*), sooner or later there must come an end even to this, which therefore cannot lead to a lasting freedom from all conflict.

That these stages are not independent achievements is also shown by the fact that these attainments require a sustained and gradual effort which leads from the step of logical deduction

grade by grade to the highest trance. The joy of solitude, as experienced by the Bodhisatta in his early youth during the royal festival inaugurating the ploughing season is said to have been the attainment of the first trance (M. 247), where discursive and sustained thought (*vitakkā-vicāra*) were left behind for the ecstatic joy (*pīti*) in the suffusion of well-being (*sukhā*).

The Bodhisatta's ultimate dissatisfaction in respect of the inefficacy of jhānic concentration leading to deliverance, made him give up his search in that direction. Hence it is not correct to say (Origins of Buddhism, by G. C. Pande, p. 380) that "through the practice of jhāna the Buddha attained Enlightenment". It was rather through his giving up the practice and effort of concentration, as well as the practice of austerities, that the bodhisatta reached that intuition of reality which in the moral sense is the Middle Path, the Noble Eightfold Path, as the outcome of the Noble Truths of conflict, of its origin from desire, and its cessation through the ending of desire. This ending of desire was for him not a new process of suppression in asceticism, or sublimation in concentration and absorption, but the realisation of insight into the nature of the process. This process he understood as one of dependent origination (*paticca samuppada*). Once life and life's conflict are understood as being dependent in their origination and cessation on the misconception of a 'self' to be saved, once it is understood, that this 'self' is a delusion, not to be purified and sanctified as a soul, not to be sublimated into a supersoul (*paramatman*), not to be lost in a beatific vision of God, not to be identified and re-absorbed into the absolute—in other words, once the realisation of non-self (*anattā*) is the basis of all understanding, then there is neither soul, nor conflict; and neither meaning nor purpose in striving for a goal of attainment. For, *that is freedom!*

The enlightenment, the awakening of the Buddha was to the real, as distinct from the ideal or apparent nature of things. Now, what is the real nature? Is it more than the world of appearance? There is no duality between appearance and reality, as the difference is only a reflection, a difference of insight, so said Nagarjuna in his Madhyamika Karika. The Buddha's awakening was his insight in the dependent origination (*paticca-samuppadda*) which was his perception of the world of becoming and of ceasing in time, from birth to death to rebirth, as applied to the timeless 'now'. If origination is simultaneous and identical with cessation, then the process of cessation is also timeless as much as it is ego-less. In the understanding of composition (*sankara*) as impermanent (*aniccā*), dependent origination is the conditioned origination and cessation, whereas Nibbāna is the unconditioned and uncreated (*asaṅkhata*, *akata*) without origination and, without cessation, timeless, absolute.

Nibbāna then is a reality, but it can be considered as a concept, though that, of course, is not only very far from realisation, but is making it into an idea. Still, if that would lead to better understanding it deserves consideration for a moment.

There is the ethical aspect, for it implies the destruction of evil propensities (*āśava*), the removal of moral hindrances (*nivaraṇā*), the freeing from all fetters (*samyojana*). In view of these removals it is called deliverance (*vimutti*). Then there is the aspect which is more psychical than ethical, because it is an evolution in the process of comprehension. It is the gradual development through the four stages of sainthood, from learner to adept (*asekhā*), from stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) to arahant. And as this process is not one of acquisition, but rather leading to no-more-becoming, it may be labelled a process of cessation (*nirodhā*). And finally there is the philosophical and metaphysical aspect which lends the concept a kind of positive character. As such it can be viewed as the deathless (*amata*), the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), the summum bonum (*parama sukha*). It is the one absolute in which there is no relativity and hence no opposition distinction or division of 'self' and non self, and no conflict. As such it is not made, not created, not caused not conditioned (*asaṅkhata*) and hence absolute.

Thus as a concept, Nibbāna is deliverance from evil, cessation of becoming, unconditioned in causation. As a good it is negative, as an end it has no means, as achievement it is freedom.

But there is never a 'self' or 'soul' which achieves or attains or begets. Inconceivable, it is yet to be experienced, not through striving and practice, but in understanding, experiencing and living in truth.

Many are the chants of triumph, uttered by those who experienced the unutterable "deliverance of heart and mind", containing the paean "The burden is laid low" (Theragata). There is no personal feeling of victory, of conquest, of attainment. That would have been the reasoned thought based on memory, of an achievement or an acquisition; and therefore, the acknowledgement of an 'I'. There would have been many occasions of struggle in the heart and mind, being oppressed in conflict, frustrated in expectation, darkened in ignorance, shrinking in fear, protecting against injury, not knowing where to turn to, or how to escape would lay shivering in exhaustion, all its self-confidence utterly drained off. It would have been on such an occasion that the mere sight of an a daily occurrence like the bursting of a water bubble in the rain, provided just that little shock, which gave a completely new light on the constant struggle for freedom from the problem of conflict.

The problem is there because of the struggle for freedom when the conflict and all struggle can only increase the problem. In its utter exhaustion through failure the mind cannot fight any more, not even for survival. That is the moment, when in the ending of the struggle there is a new sight, which is not a vista of escape, but insight which is understanding without fear or hope, seeing that the struggle for achievement is the cause of the conflict in which the idea of a continued 'self' is fighting for existence against the constant flow of change and impermanence. It is the burden of this ideal which is now laid down, with the immediate release of all anxiety and fear, in the understanding of 'no-self', and no conflict.

Such disburdening is a balancing of mind, but certainly not such an acrobatic feat as the walking on a tight rope. The 'secret' lies in leaving all weights and burdens far behind and below the point of contact, as in a jeweller's balance. The longer the distance between the balancing contact and the weighted scales, the more equilibrium is effected. In equanimity, even-mindedness, mental balance, there is just one small point of contact, and that is the present moment. The arms of the balance may carry all the weight far down on the scales, and their contents are not important. Brass weights or precious stones, all lose their values, their only importance being their place as far as possible away from the contact point.

It is in such a balance of mind that there is no thought of attachment to values left behind, that the excitement of joy (*pīti*) and even the serenity of well-being (*sukhā*) have lost their pull. Such balance is not an achievement of the mind on top, but it belongs to the whole, when all the forces of the mind and all the weights of material interests are poised, cancelling out one another in importance and weightiness; Then there is no comparing, no adjusting, but a calmness of stability, which, however, is not the safety of fixed security.

Its beauty is not in rigidity, but in the perfect pose in which all take their place. There is no joy of mind over matter, no stability of permanence of matter over mind, but the complete realisation of the totality being in a perfect state of ease and peace, of being always new and now, in which there is no thought of individuality, but only the total harmony of balance in the absence of conflict.